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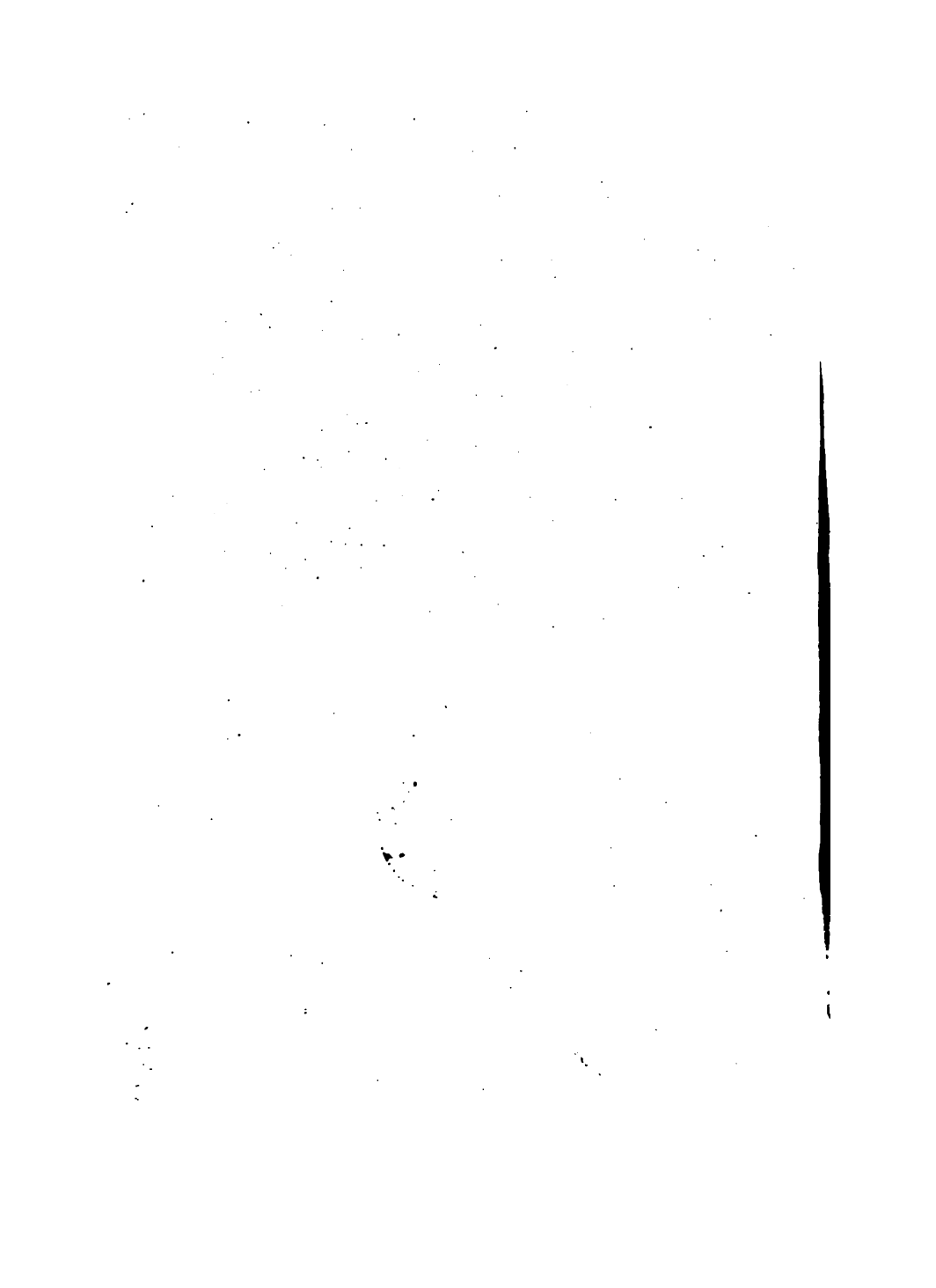
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*CHRIST'S
HEALING
TOUCH.*



CHRIST'S
HEALING TOUCH,

AND OTHER SERMONS,

PREACHED AT SURBITON,

(1861—1870)

BY

ALEXANDER MACKENNAL, B.A.



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TO THE CONGREGATION
MEETING AT
SURBITON PARK CHURCH,
THESE SERMONS,
PREACHED AT INTERVALS
DURING A NINE YEARS' PASTORATE,
NOW CLOSED,
ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.





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I.

CHRIST'S HEALING TOUCH.

MATTHEW viii. 3.

And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

THE touching of the leper was not a mere casual incident of this one miracle; it was by His touch that Christ commonly healed the sick. He touched the eyes of the blind, and put His fingers into the ears of the deaf, and touched the tongue of the dumb; and sight, and hearing, and speech were restored. He took the fevered mother-in-law of Simon Peter by the hand. He touched the bier of the young man of Nain, and took the daughter of Jairus by the hand, and when He said, "Arise," the dead were recovered to life. His touch was, however, by no means essential to the cure. To suppose that any vital influence flowed from His fingers would be to degrade the gospel miracles to mere works of magic. Christ sometimes refused even to be present when He wrought the cure; as when He said to the nobleman—"Go thy way, thy son liveth;" and the man departing found that the fever had left the lad at the time when Jesus spoke.

What purpose, then, did the touch of Christ serve? Perhaps we shall be helped in replying; if we think of how much tenderness and pathos the gospel narratives would be deprived, if this small feature were taken from them. The touch of Christ seems still to bring Him into contact with humanity; it teaches us lessons we cannot afford to lose. It falls into harmony with the whole story of His condescending sympathy.

Notice, in Christ's touch of the sick,

I. His fixing and confirming faith in Himself the Healer:

II. His answer to our craving for sympathy:

III. The symbol of His bearing our infirmities, and carrying our sins.

I. In touching the sick, Christ fixes and confirms faith in Himself as the Healer. It is in condescension to a human weakness that He lays his hands on diseased folk; we believe in little that we cannot see. How often have we sympathized with Naanan's complaint,—"*Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.*" Pain and sickness are so sensible that we look for equally sensible tokens of the energy of the restorer. It is this that makes many sick persons find comfort in the visits of the physician; which makes them crave medicines, many and violent in their operation. They have little faith in the silent, restorative power of nature; they must see the sign and mark the process of their cure. A wise physician will fall in with this weakness of his patients; if he cannot do much, even if he cannot learn much of the course of the malady by calling, he will still call; he

will send his harmless pills and potions to quiet their anxieties. Strong-headed men, without much sympathy, may despise this as jugglery, may censure it as deception; but a wise physician knows that solace is often the main thing needed for a cure.

God Himself condescended to this weakness of sick people, when He "*wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul; so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them;*" and when, again, He healed those laid in the streets on beds and couches "*that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.*" What gross superstition, some may say, is all this talk about shadows and handkerchiefs and aprons! how much better to have healed them at once without this unmeaning parade! But how, if without being solaced, they could not have been healed? Faith has, perhaps, even to-day, more to do with healing than we sometimes think. And faith certainly was the healing energy of the cures wrought by the apostles. Christ's name, "*through faith in his name,*" made the lame man strong. When Paul perceived that the cripple of Lystra "*had faith to be healed,*" he "*said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.*" The comfort and the faith can scarcely be separated from one another. It was not unworthy of an apostle to aid men's faith, to still their restlessness, by giving them sign and token of their healing.

Christ came into the world to heal sicknesses; and faith in Him, as Healer, was essential to the cure. By His touch, He fixed men's thoughts upon Himself; this was

the pledge of healing by which He stimulated and confirmed their faith. Let it be granted, that the healing energy lay in His will, not in His touch. Let it be at once affirmed, that it would have argued a clearer conception of the truth and a stronger faith, if like the Centurion of Capernaum, all had said, "Speak the word only." What then? Christ met the multitude on their own low level; He gave them such a token as they could apprehend, and so fixed their faith in Him. Their weakness of faith was itself a spiritual disease from which He sought to deliver them; from which they could only be delivered by His manifesting Himself as their Healer. "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;*" it is the feeble in faith, who needs that his faith be confirmed. Christ condescends to their weakness; He touches them, and they are healed.

The impression produced on the people was that the Healer stood among them. "*A great multitude of people out of all Judea, and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.*" Again, our critic remarks on Luke's use of this word "virtue," that 'this is a mean, material conception;' and his high spiritualities are shocked. My brethren, if our superfine critics had had it their way, these multitudes would have been left in their pains and diseases. Christ "*condescends to men of low estate;*" He meets them there, where their poverty of faith needs that they be met. His touch was not essential to the cure; but it was necessary that the poor,

unlettered, suffering multitudes should know that healing energy was in Christ. He helped their infirmity of faith, and healed them all.

Christ's touching the sick is then a symbol of that condescension to our weakness, in which He still appeals to us ; fixing our thoughts upon Himself, revealing His infinite power and ever-gracious purpose, arousing us by some special mode to contemplate what virtue is in Him, but which, without these special revelations, we should fail to see. Miracles themselves are such a condescension ; in the miracle Christ "*touches*" us, that we may see how entirely and blessedly the universe is under His control. The healing energy that seemed to flow forth now and then from the hands of Christ, dwelt always in Him ; but men scarce thought of it, save when they saw the sick recovered at His touch. The very quietness with which all nature pursues its way blinds us to the infinite force on which it is sustained. The miracle reveals to us the ever-working God. As we read how Christ stilled the storm, as we think of the power that dwelt in Him who did but say "Peace, be still," and immediately there was a great calm ; we are led to reflect on the might which keeps the ocean quiet, and, month after month, preserves it as a safe highway for the ships. Like clouds, which are a lower heaven, but conceal a higher heaven from us, are God's common forms of law. And as the clouds, when rent, show the deep blue abiding eternally beyond them ; God rends His laws that we may behold Himself.

The miracles of Christ show us that the power which checks, and controls, and guides, and keeps the world in order, is His power, the power of our Saviour and

Redeemer. It is hard for us at first to apprehend that all things were made by Christ, and that without Him was not anything made that was made; that Christ is the Ruler of the Universe, the Archetype of all things, the first-born of every creature. It is a very blessed doctrine this, that the redemption which is in Jesus Christ reveals the very form according to which all things were at first created,—the principalities, and powers, and thrones, and dominions of the highest heavens, as well as the mere materialities of this lower world, its stones and dust, its woods and waters, its creeping things and cattle; and that we can find everywhere, in spring and harvest, in seed and fruit, symbols and lessons concerning the Christian life, because everything harmonizes under one law of life in Christ Jesus our Lord. A very blessed doctrine, but hard to be apprehended; we often say, ‘What can it mean? How can it be?’ I think we are helped in our grasp of the sacred mystery when we read the miracles of Christ and see Him stand upon our world its Lord and Ruler; when we mark how all things are obedient to Him, made by Him to subserve His purpose of grace and goodness. He has condescended to our infirmity, given us signs of the truth we are so slow to grasp, and thus made it clear to us that “*all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*”

We may see this too as one among the reasons of Christ’s incarnation; “*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,*” that “*touched*” into attention, we might behold “*the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*” Christ was in God, before God was incarnated in Jesus Christ. The love and sympathy,

the reverence and righteousness, the trustiness and truth,—in one word, the grace that so moves and wins us in Jesus, dwelt in the bosom of the Father from before all worlds. But how could we have ascended up on high to bring Christ down from above? how could our world-dulled eyes have beheld, or our carnal hearts have trusted, the grace that is in our God? It needed to be, not simply revealed to us as a heavenly doctrine, but embodied in an earthly form. And so it “drew from out the vast, and struck its being into bounds.”

“And so the Word had breath, and wrought
 With human hands the creed of creeds
 In loveliness of perfect deeds,
 More strong than all poetic thought ;

“Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
 Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
 And those wild eyes that watch the wave
 In roarings round the coral reef.”

“*Touched*” are we now as by the hand of God ; and eye and ear and every sense takes in the knowledge of the gracious One ; and our feeble hearts respond to a divinely-human love ; and our feeble spirits rest in a divinely-human goodness ; and we are orphans no longer, for the Son hath made the Father known. “*He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father : from henceforth ye know him and have seen him.*”

Christian experience, again, will furnish us with many illustrations of the mode in which Christ condescends to our weakness in pursuing His purpose to save us. We none of us believe that there are times and seasons with Him. He is “*the same yesterday, and to-day, and for*

ever." He is as ready to save us the first hour we hear of Him as He can be at any subsequent time; He "*waiteth*" to be gracious unto us, with hand ever stretched out, and with voice ever pleading, "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*" Indeed, shame and self-reproach mingle with our very joy at our salvation, that we should have been so long unsaved; that we should have tarried so long un-blessed, when He has been ever ready to bless us. And yet, how full is Christian biography of instances of Christ's falling in with our expectation and using special events, special times, as the mode in which to heal us. The cares of life, the responsibilities of early manhood, the solemnity of parentage, the softening influences of bereavement, the terrors of pestilence, the fear of death—He makes all these the means of extending His grace to souls. Often too, He deals with us as with the deaf man whom He took aside from the multitude, and as with the blind man whom He led out of Bethsaida; He separates us from our companionships, secludes us by sickness or disaster from the ordinary engrossments of life, makes us feel as we never felt before alone with Him, and then He heals us. His power to save is independent of any special modes of our experience; but we are weak. And in the circumstance of our renewal, sometimes striking, often sad, He condescends to our weakness. These are the symbols which we need to awaken our desire for Him, to arouse our faith that He is with us, and that His grace is even now moving towards us. He gives us the very sign we wish for that we may believe that He is Himself making us whole.

II. See, in Christ's touch of the sick, His answer to our craving for sympathy. Those who have had much to do with the sick; who have seen how, in their tossings to and fro, a hand laid on theirs can quiet them; who have heard them say 'Sit there in the light, where I can see you;' who remember their restless craving for some token that they are being cared for, how they ask to be turned from side to side, that their pillow be smoothed, or the curtains drawn, or some little attention paid which makes their bed really no easier, but soothes them; will see, in the touch of Christ, a virtue beyond what it has as the appropriate sign of healing. They will understand that this token of sympathy had much to do with the faith in Himself as Healer, which Christ sought to cherish; for the sick have very little confidence in the power to help them of those who are not tender in their help. Christ's ability to cure would have been the same though He had never touched a sick person of them all; but the weary multitudes would not have sought to be taken to him. A very little thing was this touch, even as an indication of kindly purpose, but it was just the little thing that a sensitive sick man needed. It is, after all, little things that indicate either sympathy or antipathy. "I will buy with you," says Shylock, "sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you." Had He held aloof from them, they never would have trusted Him. Nothing so pains a sick person as the sign of shrinking from him. Wear your gloves in any room you like, but not in the sick-room. Bend your ear to the trembling dying lips, and shun not to lay your hands on the diseased, if you are

to do them any good, either as nurse or as spiritual adviser and Christian friend.

We may, however, observe in passing, that Christ's was a healing touch. There are some touches that irritate the sick; and that too, though the person touching them may be of a most tender heart. He who is at once tender and skilful is the true physician; she who has sympathy and tact is the true nurse. A kind heart is not all that is required in the sick-room; there must also be the watchful eye, the gentle hand, the educated touch. Good nursing does not come entirely by nature; rather nature's laws must be studied, and nursing must become an art. To be a good attendant in a sick-chamber, as to be anything of worth, you must study and strive. "Notes on Nursing" are not a needless impertinence; the kindest will be improved by discipline. I say these things, because in a congregation like this, there are some whose powers and sympathies now unemployed might and should find their fitting sphere of activity in attendance on the sick. You cannot all teach in a school; some, even among educated young women, are not fit for this. Nor are there districts for all to visit; in some of our suburbs, the common modes of Christian activity are overworked. But the care of the sick, systematically undertaken as a real work of life, is scarcely attempted among us. Would that some, instead of sitting hour after hour, wasting time in foolish reading, or idle reverie, or anticipations of a future that may never come, would listen to the words of Christ: "*I was sick, and ye came unto me. Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.*" Without the vow or the dress of any sisterhood, some of you might under-

take the work of Sisters of Mercy. Does it startle you, young ladies of refined tastes and education, to be asked to consecrate yourselves to this as a serious business of life? "*Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.*" For His sake, give the cup of cold water, the medicine, the night-watching and the constant care. It would be a nobler life than many are living now; it would be a true following of Christ, and would in no wise lose its reward.

In His touch of the sick, Christ meets the craving of men for sympathy. It did not really bring Him any nearer them, but it made them feel how near He was. Some of us would do well to visit the sick, that we might learn what possibilities of suffering are in man, and be made more thoughtful, more tender-hearted. There was no need of Christ's learning such a lesson, no need of awakening His sympathy. But we did need to have that sympathy revealed to us. And here, again, we are met by the wondrous doctrine of the Incarnation. It is very difficult for us to conceive of God as sympathizing with us. Sympathy is fellowship in suffering, and what room is there for suffering in our thought of God? Benign, gracious, loving, so we conceive of Him; but not sympathetic. Christ is the sympathizer, for Christ has suffered; but the goodness of God is far above us, only beaming down upon us. He shares not in our griefs; He can help us, He can deliver us, He can even pity us; but we too often think He cannot feel with us in our sorrows.

So we grope after God, "*if haply we may feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.*" We fail to take the force of the names given Him

in the Bible, just because we cannot conceive there is in Him this sympathy. What do we mean when we call God "long-suffering?" How little we think that means that He suffers long! Again, may we bless God that He has revealed Himself to us in His Son; that Christ has come down into our human life, and "*touches*" it on every side. Every day some of us are grateful for the sorrow of Christ when oppressed with human wretchedness; for His tears and groanings and shaking sobs; for all that makes them know that He is "*touched with the feeling of our infirmities.*" For we know that in every hour of trial and grief, in our bereavements and anxieties, in our sickness and pain, in our temptation and struggle; we are not left alone. Christ is with us, not only helping us, but feeling with us; knowing exactly how to succour, because He knows exactly how the burden presses on us. And now, my brethren, combine with the doctrine of Christ's sympathy, the doctrine that He is God manifest in the flesh; that He came to reveal the Father; that the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do; and you are brought face to face with the sublime mystery of a sympathizing God. How the gospel lights up, and fills with meaning such passages as these:—"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." "*He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.*"

Man's craving for God's sympathy is here met; the very craving we are sometimes ready to stigmatize as a weakness. "*They brought unto Christ infants that he should touch them; but when his disciples saw it they rebuked them.*" 'What good can a touch do them? silly

mothers to long for, to find any satisfaction in a touch.' But Jesus rebuked his disciples, and took the children in His arms and blessed them. There are very many things, that, like the touch of the children, do not seem to us of much use, but still we are weak enough to long for them. And we have a Father in heaven who is good enough to meet that weakness. "*He knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust.*" The school-master is the boy's impersonation of cold wisdom ; always so wise, with no little foolish tendernesses. The father is as wise as the school-master, but sympathetic beyond even brothers and sisters with one another. Christ has made us understand the Fatherhood of God. He would have us not stiffly, severely good, but frank and natural with Him. The touch was not needed for healing, but it was a comfort to be touched by Christ ; and "*Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, and said, I will ; be thou clean.*"

III. See in Christ's touch the symbol of Christ's bearing our infirmities, and carrying our sins. This is, after all, the sublimest meaning of our text. He "*touched*" our nature in all its pollution ; He shrank not from it, but took it upon Himself, and bore its shame and suffering. I will only remind you that it was a leprous man He touched ; I will only suggest to you that it is the foulness, the offensiveness of disease I now have in my mind. It is this which separates between the sick and the whole, we shrink from contact with sickness ; it is this which strikes sharper than any knife into the sick man's heart—'They loathe me ; I know I am unclean, and they cannot bear to touch me.' It is this which makes her who nurses him seem indeed a sister to him.

'She is not disgusted; she will tend me though she risks being herself scarred like me; she is not offended at my disease.' A thousand will subscribe to an hospital, for one who will live with the idiot or deformed; a thousand will pay the doctor and the nurse for one who will enter the cottage of the squalid sick, and spend one night there. It needs much schooling of self to suppress the instinct of revolt at sickness hideously before us. Turn now and read of Christ, that He "*touched*" the sick and healed them. You will see that in His dealing with bodily disease He did but symbolise how entirely He had taken human sinfulness to Himself.

There is a shrinking of the pure soul from the impure, a disgust at the naked forms of vice and sin, even mightier than our shrinking from the forms of bodily disease. We are ready enough to send missionaries to the drunkard, but who will associate with the poor besotted fool? We turn our back upon the harlot and the thief, we cannot endure the thought of them. To eat and drink with them, to be cheerful, genial in our efforts to do them good—nay, nay, this is asking too much. We loathe their degradation; their presence is an offence. "*He was not ashamed to call them brethren. This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.*"

I will not multiply words on this part of our subject. He who has prayed, "Do not abhor me, O my God," and has felt what he has been praying; he who has said, "*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,*" will grasp, with deep thankfulness, this truth concerning Christ. Again, I would

remind you that Christ is the revelation of the highest God ; the touch of the sick is but a symbol of the truth that God has come into personal contact with all our degradation, shrinking not from us in our sins. He dwells with us, and His pure Spirit, by constant dwelling with us, is taking our sins away.

O ! wondrous truth, that moves us to a higher sense of His Fatherhood, and quickens our faith in Him. Poor lost one, you, perhaps, are feeling thus : ' There can be no real fellowship between me and God. For pardon I may hope ; I may hope that His mercy will spare me the pains of hell ; but God cannot have anything to do with me. I must keep far from His presence ; to dwell aloof from God is alone becoming to one so sinful, so degraded as I.' My brother, it is not so. He is near you, He abides with you. His gracious Spirit dwells in your polluted soul ; He is in constant contact with you in all the vileness of your life. "*God is light.*" Like the sunbeam, penetrating the thickest darkness, striking on the foulest spots, unshrinking, unpolluted, all-cleansing by its presence, is the Holy Spirit of our God. He heals you thus. Dare to dwell with Him, to touch Him as freely as He touches you. So shall you be cleansed, and shall know the fulness of the gracious energy which was but manifested in faintest symbol when "*Jesus put forth His hand, and touched the leper, saying, I will ; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*"



II.

UZZIAH—HIS SIN AND PUNISHMENT.

2 CHRON. xxvi. 16—21.

But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction : for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men : and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense : go out of the sanctuary ; for thou hast trespassed ; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense : and, while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah, the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence ; yea, himself hastened also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper ; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord : and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land,

THE story of Uzziah is one of those narratives which many good and even thoughtful people sometimes wish they could altogether blot out of the Bible. On two points it runs directly counter to our modern habits of thought and feeling ; habits of thought and feeling which have been formed in us by the teaching and influence of the Gospel. Uzziah's sin in its formal aspect appears

much like our duty—that, namely, of protesting against the claims of an exclusive priesthood; claims which must be resisted if men and nations are to be preserved from certain degradation, and from hopeless separation from God. An enfeebled morality, again, resents all records of Divine judgment: it startles, it shocks us to read of the avenging stroke of leprosy. It is one of the great blessings of the Bible that it does run thus impartially athwart all prejudices; refusing to accommodate itself to any, even our most sacred traditions; that it compels us to study its narratives patiently and submissively, and will not allow us hastily to reduce its teachings to our own conventional standards. Its difficulties are ever the key to the deepest mysteries of our lives and of God's rule. The "door" will "open" at length to him who continues "knocking."

We first affirm, broadly and emphatically, the sole High Priesthood of Christ, and the universality of the lesser priesthood. The New Testament is decisive on this point. All who have "*tasted that the Lord is gracious*" "*are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*" The New Testament speaks of differences of gifts in the Church, of administrations and operations; but not of any exclusive rights to office. Each man has to bring for himself his offering of prayer and praise immediately to God; it is the privilege of every man to make intercession for his brethren. Christian ordination services are only acts whereby the congregation recognises and welcomes those whom God has fitted to help their fellows; the fitness is itself the call. Whatever lessons the story of Uzziah has for us, it is not intended

to prevent any whom God has enabled to edify his brethren, from using his gifts privately, in the social circle, or in the Church.

The Jewish priesthood was part of a system which, partial indeed and temporary, was yet a real dispensation of God. Exclusiveness was one mark of this dispensation. The words which give solemn urgency to the second commandment, "*I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God,*" run as a spirit throughout the whole of the Jewish worship. Of all the nations of the earth, He chose one through whom to reveal Himself. Of all the Jewish tribes, He consecrated one to the priestly office. Of all the Jewish cities, He fixed on one as the place of worship. There are many indications that a larger purpose underlay this system of restriction. Side by side with the exclusive priesthood there existed the prophetic office; not confined to any class of men, but filled, as God called them, by old men and maidens, young men and children, husbandmen and citizens, priests and princes. This, and not the priesthood, is the true type of the Christian ministry; and, as the history advances, the prophets wax, while the priesthood wanes, in influence. A freer spirit was ever asserting itself among the restrictions of Judaism; God was thus preparing his people for the large, the universal comprehensiveness of the Gospel. But while the restrictions lasted, they were to be revered; the Temple and the priesthood were not to be profaned by the intrusion of any unconsecrated man, whose pride might prompt him to rush in and demand a part in their services.

We may see some meaning in the fact that a restrictive system like the Jewish precedes the freedom of the

Gospel. The ever-broadening energies of grace rest upon the deep foundations of eternal righteousness. Before we can even understand the love that redeems by sacrifice, we must know the sanctities into which we are redeemed. God awakens the sense of holiness in men by calling them to carefulness, and reverence, and obedience. The infinite distinction between holiness and profanity is embodied in forms adapted to the childhood of the race. An order that must not be transgressed, restrictions that are not to be disregarded—these develop the sense of reverence that at length fixes itself in the character of the great and holy God. Then, when the sentiment of sanctity is confirmed, when the presence of God is felt to be a hallowing thing, it is revealed that nothing is common or unclean; that God's presence hallows every circumstance and every life; that God's name is to be always sanctified, and by every man. The priesthood was a call to worship, a mode of impressing men with the "holy and reverend name" of God. When the sentiment of reverence and the habit of worship are fully disciplined, the Apostles of Christ proclaim to all who believe, "Ye are the holy priesthood; ye are all priests unto God. The priest whom you have been taught to honour is the type of yourselves; God has sanctified you all to the service of which He began to teach you when He consecrated the tribe of Levi to Himself."

Rightly to apprehend Uzziah's sin, we must remember through what barriers he had to break before he could resolve to do this thing. He had to disregard the direct command of Jehovah that the priests alone should burn incense on His altar. He had to despise the history of his people, to reject the solemn lessons that he had learned

from childhood. He was defiling his own sacred things ; the Jewish history was the history of his own people, the charter of his own blessings ; the Temple and the priesthood were the solemn ordinances of his own worship. He was impiously defying the holy name by which himself was called. It was an act of direct and daring sin ; of wilful disobedience to his own conscience ; of contemptuous disregard of the word of Jehovah Himself addressed to him. Therefore it was—because his rebellion was so great, his defiance of his convictions and his God so flagrant, that the Lord smote him, and he bore till death the mark of the curse that fell on him for his impiety.

I have said thus much by way of general introduction, because I wish you to apprehend that this is a story of actual human life ; that there is in it nothing arbitrary, nothing merely formal ; that even in the form of the history so much unlike our own, we yet may recognise great common principles. We can feel wherein the sin of Uzziah lay, and why he was so sharply punished. As we proceed to notice the details of the story, we shall see that it touches, at various points, on the life we are living from day to day ; that it has its meanings for us ; that this too “*happened*” for an “*ensample*,” and is “*written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*” Notice,

I. Prosperity and pride. “*Uzziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God : and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.*” The arts of war and peace

flourished under his rule. He extended his borders; husbandry and commerce were enlarged under his sway. *“And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.”* What is all this but just a history daily repeating itself among us? The results of godly training and holy companionship are often seen in the prudence, and diligence, and sobriety which command success and reputation. The modes of life which the influence of the Gospel forms, which are the tradition of Christian households, are just those which conduct to happiness and honour. But if there be nothing but external modes of life; if pious influences do not find their fulfilment in actual godliness; if the God of the fathers be not made the God of the children, and Christian associations lead not to personal consecration to Christ; then the very prosperity they bring is a fatal danger; being *“lifted up with pride,”* you will *“fall into the condemnation of the devil.”*

Mere worldly prosperity is often the prelude to daring impiety. It is a perpetual question how to “remove” the “hireling” spirit out of the Church. Men whose ships bring them wealth, whose plans in business succeed, come to fancy themselves fit for any place of responsibility in the Church. What airs they give themselves. How many are their assumptions. How they despise meeker and more lowly men. How self-reliant they grow, and impatient of rebuke, and vain, and indifferent to Christ’s self-denying call! Others, too, are eager to confirm their judgment of themselves; their self-complacency is flattered instead of checked. Churches love to pay honour to men of wealth; choose for places

of special service, not those of pure heart, and fervent faith, and lowly self-denial, but those who have succeeded in business, and whose plans, it is therefore thought, must needs be followed in Church operations. This is the fellowship of Uzziah's sin. Uzziah was a good king, but he was a bad priest; he was not the priest whom God had chosen. Men whose godliness, and integrity, and Christian conduct have won them respect; men who in all things are Christ's servants, and whom He has therefore made stewards of much, are most valuable helps in all Christian activities. But mere worldly success is a poor standard by which to measure these things, and ought never to be allowed to secure to any voice and direction in Church affairs." "*It appertains not to these to burn incense unto the Lord.*" Statecraft and policy have no claim to spiritual direction. The spirit of the Gospel is not that of the successful worldling, but that of the little child of the kingdom. God does curse with weakness and trembling, with spiritual deadness, with feebleness of Christian emotion and decay of piety, those churches which are not careful to appoint to the direction of their affairs only men whose hearts He Himself hath touched.

It is a matter of personal experience how prosperity lifts up the heart, and lures us to destruction. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" If success brings self-confidence; if, instead of working zeal for God, and lowliness and meekness, as of those who know their danger, and heartier dependence on Christ and fuller consecration of ourselves in all which God has given us, it works self-reliance, and impatience of rebuke, and vanity, and indifference to

Christ's self-denying call, then is prosperity only the forerunner of spiritual decline. "*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" The promise of more grace is not for the proud. "*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*"

II. Pride and punishment. "Here now," you may be ready to say, "is something in the story which is simply Jewish, quite foreign to the life of to-day. If there is something like the arrogant impiety of Uzziah in the conduct of men who, simply because they have prospered in their temporal affairs, would eke out Christ's gospel by worldly maxims, what is there among us at all like the smiting of the King with leprosy in the house of the Lord? Do you mean to say that God visits men with judgments now? Is there anything here to come home to the hearts of Englishmen?" My brethren, I do say that God is judging us; the same God who judged His people of old. There is in this very part of the narrative something to set us thinking on the mysteries of our daily life, and to help in their interpretation.

Suppose, now, a physician had given us a purely medical report of this incident. Suppose he had told us that there was in Uzziah an unsuspected taint of leprosy: a taint which, if he had been careful of himself, especially avoiding strong passionate excitements, might never have developed into actual symptoms of disease; that Uzziah, distracted by contending emotions, excited with pride, haunted by the terrors of a conscience trained under Jewish influences, unable to shake off the fear of Divine anger for his presumption, yet urged on by ambition, had gone into the Temple of the Lord; that there, while he was engaged in stormy conflict with the

priests, the hidden taint had developed itself, and the leprosy had leapt out upon his brow—should we not at once understand the story? recognise a very common fact in the history of disease? I do not profess to give this as a medical account of the narrative; but I say, that told in this manner, it would have lacked no verisimilitude. A brand may lie concealed—a birth-mark or an old scar—during the greater part of a man's life, becoming visible at times of strong excitement. Old wounds, quiet for the most part, will throb under the influence of passion. Hereditary or constitutional disease may often lurk for a life-time unsuspected, till some circumstance favours its development, and instantaneously it works itself out in all its power. Of all such favouring circumstances, strong passionate excitement is the surest; in the heat of pride the seeds of sickness are frequently quickened.

What stories are more impressive or more common than those of men suddenly stricken down on the eve of the gratification of their pride, in the first thrill of triumph, in the very fever of unbridled ambition? A man has been all his life-time amassing wealth; satisfied at length, he builds himself a lordly mansion, that he may rank with the nobles of the land. He builds, but he never enjoys it:—he is found some morning smitten with impotence; and the palsied speech-muscles refuse to articulate a word. A statesman is summoned to the royal presence-chamber: at the council-table, the blood-stain at his lips declares that honours and life will soon be laid together in the dust. A student is called to preside over some learned body: his brain gives way, and the asylum is henceforth his home. A Jewish story

this, foreign to the life of to-day? Instead of leprosy, read paralysis or hæmorrhage, or softening of the brain, and it is just a narrative from our daily press. For one who "*comes to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season,*" hundreds are swept away by pride or passion, in the conflict and the triumph of life. Say what we will, this is true, that pride and passion, unregulated ambition, and impious recklessness, do terribly punish those whom they enslave.

The Jewish story interprets the English life. If Englishmen trace these things to natural causes, and go no further, while the Jew says "God has smitten him," the Jew is right and the Englishman is wrong. It is a sign of unbelief and folly to refuse to trace God's hand, save in events that are utterly unintelligible. God's great work is to reveal, not to hide Himself. It is part of His order of nature that bodily pains should often reveal and rebuke the workings of an ungodly soul. No Jew would ever have thought it out of place to speak of God's hand in an event, simply because the natural causes might in part be traced. The Jewish history is God's revelation of Himself in all history; He is thus teaching us how to interpret what we see around us. How solemn does every story of unregulated passion and overweening ambition, ending in bodily disorder, thus become to us? How earnest the warning of the common jury-verdict, "Died by the visitation of God?" God is thus coming as close to our English people as He came to the Hebrew nation; speaking to us, judging us, punishing, warning us, even as He did them. Judgment of others is forbidden us; from judgment of others every true heart will shrink; but the warnings are

abundantly around us. The solemn truth that pride and passion are destroyers of man, the remembrance of those who have been destroyed by them, are admonitions to us, "*Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.*"

The hour of pride is often, too, an hour of terrible revelation of hidden spiritual taints; which of us has not found secret sins leaping to light in the heats of unbridled passion? We flattered ourselves that God made us to prosper because we sought Him. Our seeking of Him became a tradition of the past, a memory, we thought; we had overcome our temptations, laid aside our easily besetting sin; and, even while we boasted, we fell before God and men. We have thanked God we were not as other men; suddenly we have had to change our boasting, we have known ourselves the chief of sinners. We never thought we could do a mean thing; we could not withdraw our hearts from the noble and the good, and decline to the ungodly, the impure, the base. Allured by ambition, we have done even this; we have flattered the unworthy to gain them, fallen to their level in the very endeavour to use them for our ends. We find in ourselves not only the seeds, but the power of vices which we have most loudly, most bitterly, condemned in others. Prosperity and pride are terrible revealers of men; often they are real punishments of God. It is His hand that humbles us, smites and lays us low; He is judging us that we may judge ourselves. It is a very perilous thing for a man to give himself to cherish the sincerest consciousness of spiritual prosperity. Doubtless, we ought to grow in grace. We ought to know that we are growing; it is not humility, it is unbelief, impiety, which refuses to recognise that we are being

conformed to the image of Christ, and to thank God for it. But we must not refuse to know our danger even here. "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" If we rest on our growth instead of in the God who gives it,—if we glory in our spiritual prosperity instead of glorying in our God,—we are proud, knowing nothing. The remembrance of our own past piety is of no more use than the influence of a departed friend; it is not in our honoured Zechariah, "who has understanding in the visions of God;" it is not in the fact that "so long as we sought God, God made us to prosper," that our security lies; but in our seeking God, and seeking Him always. As long as we seek God, He will make us to prosper; but only so long. Keep we ever near Him, ever following Him, ever obeying and trusting Him, and we shall be "marvellously helped and be strong."

III. Punishment and shame. Hope concerning Uzziah is given in the record of his hasting to go out of the Temple. His proud heart was broken; he was smitten with shame. There needed not "the priests, the valiant men," to thrust him out: "*Yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him.*" It may have been mere terror that drove him forth, the force of circumstances, and not a convicted, penitent heart. His self-abasement may have been as godless as was his exaltation. It may have been so;—but it may have been far otherwise. Assuredly God intended it to be otherwise. A man is not altogether lost while he can feel shame. God quickens the "*sorrow of the world which worketh death*" into "*godly sorrow working repentance to salvation, not to be repented of.*"

Of the seven years that he spent in the "several

house" we know nothing; of this we may be sure, that during all those years, God was seeking to restore and save his soul. What the "several" house was is doubtful. Some take it to have been a leper hospital; others a separate house, where he dwelt alone, freed from the kingly office, liberated from the cares and responsibilities of the throne. But whether he dwelt among sufferers, shameful men like himself, or quite alone, there was opportunity for him to offer himself in life-long penitence to God. He was debarred from the Temple; he could never cross its threshold more. But God dwells in the hospital and the solitary place. He was cast on God whose care are all the wretched; he had but to cast himself on God and be forgiven and restored. The leprosy might cling to him, never more could he be king; but in the fellowship of the suffering was an opportunity of rendering true service. In solitude, while his son was over his kingdom, and regents were doing the work God had taken from his hands, he might have learnt many a lesson he had not learnt upon the throne.

The king who aspired to an honour God had not called him to, deprived of the very service to which God had appointed him, sinking at last into a dishonoured grave, buried in the field without his fathers' resting place, and not in the tomb itself:—these are touching aspects of the story, of universal human interest. The dignity and service forfeited through pride may be never regained. A stain may cling to the name; the reputation long held honourable, and lost through a shameful fall, may not even after death be recovered. Sons may blush more over the dishonourable grave and the one terrible sin of their fathers than they triumph in

the glory of a whole life. Impiety is a fearful thing, and has a fearful curse. But no curse is final; the shame that is felt may be washed away. God's judgments are for mercy's sake; He humbles that He may lift up. "*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.*" It is better to be humbled and repent than to go proudly on to the final revelation. Shame is an angel of mercy, a blessed messenger of God. God would teach us the truth about ourselves that we may learn the truth about Him. He shows us that there is no steadfastness in us, no purity, no goodness in us; that we may depend upon His goodness, claim His righteousness, be secure in His steadfastness.

A world in which God's judgments are abroad is a very awful world; but infinitely more awful a world in which He should not judge. "*I will sing,*" says the Psalmist, "*of mercy and judgment.*" Wondrous blending, mercy and judgment; each the minister and helper of the other. "*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*" Let God still judge us, that He may bring us to Himself, cleansing us of all our iniquity, our pride, and passion, and impiety; and leading us ever to seek Him, and ever finding, ever to be strong in Him. Amen.



III.

SORROWFUL LABOUR.

PSALM cxxvi. 5, 6.

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

THIS Psalm should be read in conjunction with Psalm cxxxvii. The two Psalms are as pendant pictures; they show us the beginning and the end of Israel's bondage in Babylon, and suggest to us the history of their intervening life. The Babylonian captivity fell upon the Jews with paralysing force. They could but "*sit down and weep by the rivers of Babylon;*" "*hanging their harps upon the willows*" and with their hands fallen listless by their side, they remembered Zion and wept. But they could not continue long indulging the luxury of an indolent grief. "*They that wasted them*" required of them labour as well as mirth; and the demand for labour could not, like that for singing, be turned away with the appeal, "*How shall we in a strange land?*" The necessities of their position summoned them from their listlessness; they had to fulfil their duties to the land in which they were. They ceased not from weep-

ing, their very labour was with tears. They shared not the joy of the Babylonians, but they shared their work. The peace and security of Babylon reminded them of the desolations of Jerusalem, Babylonian homes of their ruined dwellings, Babylonian worship of their fallen temple on Mount Zion. But while they wept, they toiled; they sowed, and strangers gathered in the fruit. At length their own harvest came; God turned to their captivity as He sent the rain-streams upon the barren south-lands. He had watched their patient toil, their sorrowful fidelity; and after many years He gave them their reward. Deliverance came to them from the ruler of Babylon himself; they returned to their own land with the good wishes and the sympathies of their task-masters. Then were they "*like them that dream*;" they could scarcely believe the unexpected blessing that had befallen them. "*Their mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing.*" Their heathen captors shared their gladness; they, too, rejoiced that Jehovah had visited His people, saying, "*The Lord hath done great things for them.*" The Lord hath done great things for us, responded the joyous freedmen, "*The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.*" They had gone, they had gone, weeping, bearing their seed-basket; they came, they came, rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

In other books of the Old Testament, we are told a little of the history of the Jews in Babylon. After their removal from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah sent them a letter which you will read, Jer. xxix. :— "*Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Build ye houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;*

take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." It was hard for them to be told to live in Babylon as they had lived at home, to labour and to pray for the very men who had wasted them and carried them away. What heart had they to labour in a foreign land? How far off seemed the promise of restoration! Seventy years were to be accomplished, during which they were sadly to remember Zion. It was a time of sorrow for them; the time was long, and they were captive exiles; if they sowed it must be with weeping, their tears would wet the furrows into which they cast their seed. But they settled down to labour, and faithfully served their alien masters; and lo! God returned the fruit of their fidelity into their own bosoms. "*By patient continuance in well-doing,*" they won the confidence of their oppressors, and "*put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*" Daniel and the three Hebrew princes were honoured at the court of Nebuchadnezzar; and the Median monarchs trusted the captives they found in the land they overran. In the book of Ezra, chap. i., we read that "*the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia, to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.*" Cyrus himself sent back those Jews who were ready for this work, and asked for them gifts from the people whom they were leaving. With the precious vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had brought to Babylon, they returned to Jeru-

salem, and with many a present of gold and silver, and goods, and beasts, freely given them by those who had before despoiled them. So did they reap that which they in tears had sown. Their Lord had touched the heart of their oppressors : their patience and fidelity were thus rewarded. The sowing had been tearful, but the seed was not lost ; they came again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

I. The first lesson suggested to us here is that we are often called to labour in which we have little joy.

Doubtless, the highest form of work is that which we do joyfully ; this, we hope, will be the work of heaven. But assuredly, this is not wholly the character of our work on earth ; we are often called to labour from which all the hope and gladness have departed, and when we had rather sit in the listlessness of indulged melancholy.

The call to labour, for instance, may continue, when those whom we hoped to gladden with our diligence and fidelity are gone. In a true household, parents and children live for one another. The father is cheered in his work by the presence of the little ones for whom chiefly he labours. What anxieties he will endure, how gladly he will endure them, that he may educate his children for a useful manhood, and send them out to reap the honours of his name and adorn it with fresh honours that they will gather. One after one, they are taken from him ; what heart has he to work now they are gone ? The youth delights in the prospect of repaying his parents in some measure for their devotedness to him ; he seeks for honours which they may be proud to see him wear ; still more, the Christian youth would

make them grateful for his Christian uprightness and usefulness. They are taken away at his very outset in life ; he never can lay his honours at their feet, the star that guided him seems shorn of half its lustre. A peculiar tenderness hallows the relation of the master to the apprentice whom he loves, the tutor to the student whom he loves. To show these fathers of our skill and thought that their labour is not lost is no unworthy object of ambition ; the first-fruits of the harvest shall be a tribute offered to them. The friend who led you to the Saviour, the father who "*begot you through the gospel*" is dearest of all earthly friends ; you rejoice to anticipate his grateful watching of your Christian course. How rarely are such hopes fulfilled ? The one of all others whose sympathy and satisfaction you would keep with you through life is often he of whose companionship you are first deprived. There is scarcely a labour successfully accomplished, an honour honourably won, but has its sorrowful suggestion of a lost one who would have rejoiced and been grateful with you.

These are among the earliest and most common griefs that befall us ; and they are very desolating. They change, for a season, our cheerful impulses to labour into heartless toil. We hang our harps upon the willows ; fain would we hang there our implements of labour also. But that we cannot do ; the call to work continues, unaffected by the change that disheartens all our efforts. The duties of the household remain though the light of the home seems quenched ; the responsibilities we have undertaken, business engagements, the claims of circumstance, all these demand attention. The work for which we have been fitting ourselves has to be done ;

we have been called into our sphere, and we must fill it. Nay, often the call to labour is more urgent because these kindly hopes are blighted. We feel ourselves reproved for setting our aim too low, or thinking too much of the lower aim. We must take the place of those who are gone; the children must accept the labour of the fathers; the need of Christian effort is the greater as Christian workers and supplicants are withdrawn; duty, stern duty, bids us out. The tears must not hinder the sowing. God hath "*laid our vine waste and barked our fig-tree;*" but though despondent, we must work.

All earnest labourers, again, are liable to fits of despondency; Christian labourers certainly not less than others. Overwork, perhaps, is followed by reaction, or the too eager hope is disappointed because we see not any results for all our doing. We think that our fellow-labourers are not as earnest as we, that we alone are bearing the burden and heat of the day. Then there comes up the question, what is the use of all our toil? the murmur, "*Verily I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain.*" The whole world seems weary; all effort appears but restlessness; there is no profit to all the labour that is done under the sun. One generation passeth away and another cometh; life is too short for hope, too short for any effective effort. "*The sun ariseth and he goeth down;*" "*all the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full;*" "*all things are full of labour; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing.*" "*The thing which hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun.*"

" We pass ; the path that each man trod
 Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds :
 What fame is left for human deeds
 In endless age ? "

" Therefore we hate life ; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto us : for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Yet for all our despondency, the call to labour ceases not. If we would not be faithless to all we have known of duty and of God ; if we would not be false to all we have learnt of life, and to every principle by which our souls are moulded, we must do the work that lies ready to our hands. We have taken up the seed-basket and the furrows are still yawning to receive it : we must sow, though we sow in despondency and in tears.

Again, we may be called to work in which we feel but little special interest ; work which is to us perpetual self-denial. Our hopes may all tend to one sphere of effort ; duty may sternly compel us to another. Our tastes, what we think our capabilities, all point us to some department of labour, which we paint for ourselves in glowing colours ; and here we are kept amid men and engagements with which we have the smallest sympathy. " In the world's broad field of battle " convictions, among the dearest to us, are being striven for ; we long to fling ourselves into the thick of the conflict, and be among " the foremost in the strife ;" but we have ignobly to tarry keeping watch over the stuff, to be perpetually busy in little cares in our own and our neighbours' houses. Yet it is the clear call of duty we are obeying, it is God's seed we have to sow. We have to constrain ourselves to fidelity ; with every handful we

cast into the soil, we cast tearfully the hopes and the energies of a more grateful life.

The image of the fourth verse suggests to us another illustration of the lesson that we are often called to labour in which we have little joy. The barren south-land needed the constant rain-stream, but often the time of sowing came when the clods were hard, and the soil arid and dusty. With tears of vexation the husbandman had then to pursue a hopeless toil; it seemed but waste alike of seed and labour to sow in parched-up lands. We have often to work amidst ungracious men, with no hope at all that our labour shall be successful. There are other and happier labourers in other and more promising fields; why should we be here toiling to no avail?

In these, and many other ways, we learn, as years advance, that our life on earth is not altogether like the life in heaven; that God's great call to us is to labour, and that His call to labour continues though there is no joy to us in working. But it is still God's call, and not our gladness, that is to give character to our lives; the claim of duty ceases not with our impulses of joyful work.

II. The second lesson of our text is that God rewards us according to our fidelity, and not according to our gladness.

They that sow shall reap. The seed is God's, and God's too is the increase; only let us cast God's seed into God's soil, it matters not though we sow in tears, He will bless us with the harvest. God has His purpose in every call of duty; His purpose is to give us the blessedness of what we do. Often, indeed, the only purpose

we can perceive is the immediate one of keeping us in effort; but He has the further purpose of blessing us, and this we shall know at length. We shall gather the sheaves of our own sowing; the reward we never looked for shall be ours.

Many have jumped far too hastily to the conclusion that the result of their effort will be according to the cheerfulness of it; our text assures us that it is the sower, not simply the happy sower, who reaps. Earnest labour is indeed successful labour, but often there is great earnestness shewn in the fact that men work at all. Hearty labour is indeed successful labour; but is there no force of heart in the victory by which men overcome the temptation to indulge in melancholy musing, and constrain themselves to listen to the call of duty which seems a mocking intrusion in their solitary grief? He who refuses to be beckoned away to more grateful fields of toil, and works on amid depression and ungraciousness—is he not as hearty as the man who works gladly because he works in the sphere of his own choice? Christ has never said, according to your gladness be it unto you; not even according to your hopefulness be it unto you; but according to your faith. And faith's triumph is seen in that it can live and labour when the light of joy is quenched; that it can call off the hopes that hover round an earthly brightness, and bear them up through darkness to the throne of the Invisible. It is not true that the sanguine are the best workers, nor are they the most successful. Alas for us, in a sorrowful world, if there were no true, no blessed effort, except our joyous ones. Enthusiasm dies out, earthly hopes fade, many of them in their satisfaction, as others by the

removal of their objects. Often, when we have what we longed for, we are bitterly disappointed; and "Vanity of vanities" is again our cry. But whatever fails, fidelity fails not; the labourer for Christ, however he may labour, sadly or joyously, in weariness or in the freshness of prolonged youth, sees at length that he has not wrought in vain.

Our confusion of the reality of faith with the eagerness of feeling, our making so much of the cheerfulness of work instead of the work itself, shews that we are expecting the increase of ourselves rather than from God. The work is done; it leaves our hands, henceforth it is in His. The seed is sown; His seed is under His own care. He gives the dew of His benediction, the fruitful force is that of the ever-working Spirit. Not for nothing is it that God's great, ceaseless call to us is to do the work which He has given us; for, indeed, this is all we can do. We can be faithful to His call of duty, He is faithful to His promise.

Nor is it true in actual Christian life, that what we did in gladness has had more fruitful issues than other faithful work. There are many surprises in Christian experience which make us for gladness "*like them that dream*," many a sheaf has been given us which we little thought to gather. There is a necessary self-involvement in all grief which only the immediate call to duty and the effort itself can overcome. He who sows in tears, almost forgets, when he has left the field, that he ever sowed at all. When the duty of the hour is done, the sorrow returns; grief fills up the field of memory, of all except this he is oblivious. There is a kind law of God's at work, moreover, according to which a sor-

rowful period of our history becomes dim through the lapse of time, and sad scenes and circumstances fade away. Which of you can remember all the detail of your saddest experiences? The general impression is with you; but the details you cannot recall. It would be too painful for you to be constantly recalling them; God therefore kindly blurs their outline, and at length they disappear.

Many of the labours men have wrought in sadness are quite forgotten by them; but God never forgets. The weary Christian visitor has forgotten that in a time of sore affliction to him, he entered such a house and prayed over such a sick one, and solaced such a mourner, and tenderly strove with such an erring soul; till one day his words are recalled to him gratefully by the object of his care, and then he learns that God has blessed his efforts. For many a year, another did uncongenial work, and happier scenes have almost effaced their recollection; but, visiting again the scene of his trials, one and another speak to him of what he has forgotten, but what they cannot forget, because God made it new life to them. How often, too, has God brought streams upon the barren earth? In most unpromising soil we labour on; so unpromising is it, we labour there, not so much because we would as because we must, and we often lament that all our toil is wasted. But it is not wasted; no faithful effort ever is. The heart that seemed most obdurate is melted, words of grace and truth breathe soft on lips often sullied with profaneness and obscenity; the publican is changed into a just and generous man, and the prodigal is now restored. O, would we but learn that there should be no room for

despondency in Christian hearts ! How many, many a time has God reproved us, gently, lovingly reproved us, by giving us an unexpected joy that has made us like men that dream ! "*They that sow in tears do reap in joy.*" We go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and we think that there shall never more for us on earth be a joy like that of harvest ; but we do come again with rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us.

Startling is it to find ourselves blessed where we never looked for blessing. As God forgets not the seed we sow, so neither does He forget who sowed it. Ours was the grief, ours the effort of self-control and renewed activity, ours the hand that scattered the seed ; into our bosom God crowds the sheaves. The eye that drooped earthward, and let fall brimming tears, is now raised to heaven, filled it may be with tears once more, but grateful tears, tears of how much gladness, tears too that brighten as they seek the sunlight. The voice breaks again, and the lip is once more quivering ; but the lip quivers with thankfulness, and gladness is the burden with which the voice is thrilling.

Cease not to labour, then, however much you weep ; your weeping does not render void your work. Be thankful that God will not let you sink into listless melancholy, will not gratify your restless desire for an easier toil. He is in all this preparing for you a fruitfulness which now you could not anticipate ; He is compelling you to lay up for yourself a richer blessing. "*You go, you go weeping, bearing precious seed ; you shall come, you shall come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you.*"

III. Our text speaks not only of sheaves for the

sowing, but also of rejoicing for the tears. The very tears are a seed that shall have a joyful springing; the sorrow shall return again in joy.

The sorrowful sowing is a testimony for God, and this shall bear its fruit in joy. There is a striking contrast between the taunt of those who carried the Jews away captive, "*Sing us one of the songs of Zion;*" and this saying among the heathen, "*The Lord hath done great things for them.*" The patient labour of the exiles, the quiet toil of those who could not sing, won the heart of their oppressors. They were glad when the captives were restored, and sent them away with kindly gifts. Israel's patience was the patience of faith; and Israel's faith was a witness to the fidelity of Israel's God. God's faithfulness was thus proclaimed among the heathen; they knew who had done these great things for them. Even Babylonian task-masters were moved at this touching spectacle of Israel's faith, and of the truth of the Lord Jehovah. Was not that worth all the sorrow, so to commend their God? The patience and faithful effort of sad but trusting souls, Christian faith abiding unshaken though joy has gone out of the life; here is a lesson which cannot fail of impressiveness. It reaches to the unbelieving, and constrains them to thought concerning the gospel; it cheers the heart and strengthens the faith of all believers. God's faithfulness is commended by all true labour in sorrow; they say among the sinners, "*The Lord hath done great things for them;*" "*many shall hear, and fear, and turn to the Lord;*" "*the humble hear thereof and are glad.*"

God's name is more fully revealed to the man himself whose sorrow is turned into joy; he comes to a

fuller confidence and a fuller adoration of God. Many of the tears thus shed are unbelieving tears ; all of them are the tears of those who are not yet in their Father's house. If we could see all that God sees in our sorrowful sowing, our sorrow would at once be turned into joy. If we could apprehend the fulness of Christ's words, "*I am the resurrection, and the life : he that believeth in me shall never die,*" we should not weep at separation, for we should know that real separation there was none. And the greater blessedness to which God is calling us, when He bids us to unwelcome labour, would quite outweigh the "*light affliction which is but for a moment.*" But God does not give us to see all this ; "*now we see through a glass darkly.*" Each new revelation of God's grace that comes on us as a surprise reproves us that we did not always rejoice as those who might be sure that all God's ways are love. But it is blessed to feel ourselves reproved that our God may be exalted ; we welcome the humbling lesson about ourselves which makes us more fully know how good He is.

The joyful reaping that follows a tearful sowing prepares us for new trials of our faith. Israel had yet to wait, had yet to be patient. Difficulties were in the way of the rebuilding of the temple ; even in this Psalm, we find a prayer as from men again troubled, "*Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.*" But they could put up this prayer more fervently, and already could comfort themselves in the assurance of its answer, because of the joy that had been rendered them for their sorrow. There may come again to you a time of tears, a time of sorrowing toil ; but you know whose hand will at length wipe away all tears ; you know that

there is no seed-time but will at length yield its rejoicing sheaves.

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” The table of our Lord reminds us that the tears and the sowing for Him were one ; that His sorrow and His labour were the same. The seed He sowed was His own life, He Himself went into the dark grave. *“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”* And Christ has called His servants to follow Him ; we dare not look for any other life than a *“going forth, weeping, bearing precious seed.”* Immediately after the words I have just quoted, in which He foretells His death, He adds, *“He that loveth his life shall lose it ; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me ; and where I am, there shall also my servant be ; if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”* Even so, Amen, let us reply ; we will suffer with Thee, for we shall also reign with Thee ; we would be ever with our Lord ; with Thee in the sorrowful sowing, with Thee in Thy return again with rejoicing when Thou shalt bring thy sheaves with Thee.



IV.

ON BEING KNOWN OF GOD.

PSALM CXXXIX. 23, 24.

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

THE blessedness of God's thorough knowledge of us—this is the subject of our meditation. This Psalm is a Psalm of gladness; of deep and tranquil satisfaction in the all-searching God. It is full of humility, the profound humility of one who feels that he cannot hide himself from God. But profound as is the lowliness, equally marked is the joy of David that God knoweth him altogether. The end of the Psalm is a prayer; David does not deprecate the searching of his heart by the all-seeing One, he invokes it. There are many here, I am sure, who know the blessedness of such a prayer as this; who have learnt to rest in God's knowledge of them, to depend upon it as their vindication against all false judgment of them, and the correction of their mistakes about themselves. And if there should be also those who regard the all-searching eye of God not with gladness, but with terror and dismay, let them learn how false and foolish such a terror is, that the very

blessedness of life is the fact that, they cannot hide their hearts from the heavenly Father, however they may hide them from their fellow-men and from themselves. It is not in fleeing from God, but in fleeing to Him, that we find rest to our souls ; not in saying to the mountains 'fall on us,' and to the hills 'cover us from the face of God ;' but in turning to Him who is full of truth and of compassion, and saying, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts : and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*"

I. Think, first, of the blessedness of God's knowledge of our loyalty. This is the subject suggested by the context. David is declaring that he has neither sympathy nor part with the wicked. "*Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee ? and am not I grieved with them that rise up against Thee ? I hate them with perfect hatred : I count them mine enemies.*" He appeals to God whether this is not so ? "*Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts.*" Am I not right in affirming my love for Thee ? Is not my heart set upon my God ? Are not all my thoughts for Thine honour ?

The consciousness of integrity is one of the most striking features of Hebrew piety ; it breathes through the utterances of poet, prophet, and saint. The book of Job is full of it : "*till I die, I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go : my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*" It comes up again and again in the Psalms : "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me : but verily God hath heard me ; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer.*" It was the constant gladness of the pious Jew that he could make his appeal to the

all-seeing and rightly-judging God against the false judgments of men, and amid the disasters that were commonly regarded as the punishment of hidden sins. On their consciences and on their God they stayed themselves against the wicked attacks of the cruel, and the shallow judgments of the perverse. There was One who saw what man did not see, the effort of the heart to hold fast to God; God's knowledge of their loyalty was their comfort and support.

The consciousness of sin, rather than that of righteousness, is the distinguishing mark of Christian experience; nor will this contrast between Jewish and Christian piety seem strange to those who compare the gospel with the law. We have beheld "*the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" The sanctity of Jesus makes all our righteousness appear as filthy rags. Christ told His disciples that the preaching of the gospel would awaken convictions of sin such as were unknown before: "*When the Spirit of truth is come, He shall convict the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment.*" The love of God is far more searching than the precepts of the stony table; the heart that might have been unmelted at the demands of law is broken by the claims of affection. The loyalty that might pass unproved, did we but think of what we are bidden, proves but poor as an expression of our gratitude, our response to God's affection. The Hebrew saint contrasted himself with the sinner; Christians, searched by the Spirit of holiness and love, rank themselves among transgressors. God hath, in the mercy He hath shown to all, shut us all up to the conviction of unbelief and transgression.

And yet there must be some sad defect in our piety, if we are never able to open our hearts to God, assured that He will find loyalty there. Year after year we have known the love of Jesus ; is it so that we cannot honestly say with Peter, "*Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee ?*" We have had many an opportunity of proving the blessedness of being with Christ ; we have known the purifying power of tribulation, the grace that strengthens in trial, the peace of lowliness, and the triumph of sacrifice : can we not say with James and John, "We are able to drink of Thy cup, and be baptised with Thy baptism ?" We surely ought not to be always coming, confessing the same sins, declaring that their power is as great as ever, that we have gained no stedfastness, caught no inspiration of loyalty, along our Christian life. Nay, my brethren, assuredly it is not so. We have to bewail many a failure, many an imperfection, but a loyal-hearted Christian should be true to himself, and declare his devotion too. At least the heart is firm in its allegiance ; it is your joy to have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and to know that God's way is perfect ; it is your desire, your deep resolve and firmest effort, to hold true to God whatever your temptations ; whatever your folly and your weakness, you mean, with all sincerity, to serve God.

Now, it is an immense comfort to us to be able to rest on God's perfect knowledge of our loyalty to Him. We feel it sometimes when we have to appeal to Him against the misjudgment of men. "*Men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.*" But often the issue of loyalty to God is trouble, disaster, the forfeiture of con-

fidence and friendship. At times, too, through a mistake on our part, our good is evil-spoken of, and we are credited with evil intent when, after all, we have only acted through ignorance. An old evil reputation may cleave to a man, and the efforts of the penitent may be misunderstood, his very attempts at amendment being regarded as the cunning of the accomplished hypocrite. It is not always well to be anxious to justify ourselves before men. Self-respect may keep us mute in presence of an acrimonious accuser; circumstances may compel us to be silent about our motives. It is never wholesome to be eager in self-vindication; in this way we foster self-conceit and obstinacy.

We find the blessedness of God's perfect knowledge of us, too, in many an hour of self-distrust, when we begin to suspect our own purity of intention. If there is danger in speaking too much in self-vindication, there is peril, on the other hand, in dwelling too much on our consciousness of integrity. We may thus become self-sufficient and arrogant, and then our haughtiness will be our curse. "*The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*" The penalty of the proud man, who shuts himself up in indifference to the opinion of his fellows, is not only that they will leave him to his solitude; it is very often that in the hour of his solitude his own heart turns against him, and his sharpest accusations are from within. Failure and misfortune tell upon ourselves as well as on others; and in hours of depression, when we think of our various motives, and the sin that mingles with our holy things, intense and bitter self-judgment may be at work. Nothing is more painful to the sen-

sitive conscience than this self-suspicion: we thought we meant well, but are we so sure of that? Men cannot be our judges; we dare not judge ourselves: it is bliss to turn away to the Judge who seeth right. "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts.*" Where I am right, confirm me; where I am wrong, set me right." The tangled web of motive is all clear to Him. He knows the heart that is set on serving Him; He can distinguish between ignorance and ill-intent; He is not misled by the result; He sees integrity of purpose, and marks the desire to hold true to Him; and He will bring out the righteousness of His servants, making it clear as the light. He will also correct the hidden faultiness: "*see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*"

II. Think of the blessedness of God's knowledge of our struggles. One of the reasons why we should not judge our fellows is that we do not know the men. We see the temptation yielded to; we know not the many temptations that have been resisted, how hard was the struggle to resist. We see a great and crowning sin; we are not acquainted with the seduction of circumstances, we did not mark how one small false step at first led the feeble victim on into a wild of debasements. The compassionate God takes account of all this; and hence, for the returning sinner, it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. Signs of feeble piety, too, we can mark. God knows all that makes even that feeble piety a very victory of faith. We note the uncertainty of temper, we hear the captious phrase; only one eye takes note of the depression and bitterness of soul out of which this is

wrung. I have heard in connection with Wesley's life the story of a man of apparently large means but of beggarly gifts. Wesley was annoyed at this sign of want of love to Christ, and sharply reproved the man for it. He learned, however, that the man was at the time living on a very small daily pittance, feeding on boiled parsneps, that he might pay off the liabilities of an old bankruptcy. If God had not given us the Book of Psalms, we should wonder at the place assigned to David among the saints. We should think but lightly of the godliness of an adulterer and murderer. But God has given us to read the fifty-first Psalm, and shown us His servant's profound penitence. In many another Psalm He has let us see the royal poet's secret fears and aspirations, his faith and struggles. All the high priest's servants heard Peter's denial of his Lord; only the Lord knew how near that loyal heart was to breaking with its sin, and that a loving look would send him out weeping bitterly. How hard is the ignorance of the world; how hard, too, the inconsideration of the Church! God does not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax.

Here, too, mark—the refuge of the struggling spirit is not in self-sufficiency, not in self-justification. It is a perilous thing to balance our failures with our temptations. We only debase ourselves when we excuse our guilt by the consideration of our trials and our resistance. We are not the proper judges of ourselves; our leniency would be our undoing. We need not only to be searched but also to be purged, and He is at once compassionate and firm. *“He sets our iniquities before him; our secret sins in the light of his counte-*

nance." These, surely, but not these alone. Infirmities, temptations, struggles—all are known to Him. His judgment is according to truth. He knows how to reprove and how to comfort; how to smite, and how to bind up. "*Search me, O God, and know my heart*"—see it all; what is pitiful as well as what is evil—"try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

III. Think of the blessedness of God's thorough knowledge of our sins. To me, one of the strongest arguments against the priestly confessional seems to be the fact that it cannot possibly be honest. So long as there is a motive for concealment, so long shall we practise concealment. We cannot reveal ourselves, so as to surprise or shock any one with our baseness; our desire to stand well in others' eyes prevents it. We cannot be frank save with those who already know us. The desire to conceal part of the truth works very subtly, works almost unconsciously. Penitents at the confessional are tempted either not to tell all, or by a strange but common insincerity, to exaggerate their transgressions, expecting that others will make the abatement, and will surely think them better than they profess to regard themselves. The priest is practised in the art of worming the secrets out of his penitents. He has to learn the science of casuistry, to acquire the skill in cross-examination of a lawyer; and hence defilement of conscience and the insincerity of an art where there should be, on the one side, only the strictest truthfulness, and, on the other, perfectly unsuspecting confidence.

You know how frank confession becomes when all motive to concealment is gone. A wise parent who has detected his child in a fault which must be taken notice of will at once tell the little one he knows all. With fatherly sensitiveness for a child's conscience, he will remove the motive for concealment, that the confession may be full. A spendthrift very rarely hands in the schedule of all his debts; even a bankrupt will not do this, though he knows what evils will follow the concealment. Men go bearing about with them the knowledge of their transgressions against one another, longing that circumstances will reveal the truth, and enable them to be honest. No, my brethren, despite the burden of unconfessed sin, despite the craving for open acknowledgment; sin is not wholly confessed, confessed without excuse and dishonest palliation, till it is already known.

God's perfect knowledge of our sins takes away the motive, because it removes the possibility, of concealment. He who has feeble conceptions of God's searching vision will be full of evasions; he will be full of self-deceit. The complete conviction of transgression follows, and does not precede, the feeling that God knows it all; for honesty in our dealings with ourselves we need to be searched of God. Confession begins with the words of our text—"*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts.*" "Show me to myself, O God; rid me of all self-deception. I do not know my own heart; I am not fit to judge my own thoughts; but Thou, O Lord, hast knowledge of all."

The burden of secret sin—he who knows it will say

that it is the heaviest, the only intolerable burden men can bear. It eats into the very soul, poisoning life at its springs. It is the torturing demon men bear about with them, from which multitudes are longing to be freed. To this is due the prevalence of self-torture in so many a Pagan creed, and the Catholic or Pagan form of Christianity. The secret must have some expression, and self-torture seems to hint at the dread pollution within. The gospel offers immediate cleansing to the conscience; and its cleansing virtue lies very much in the fact that it brings so near to the sinner the God who has searched him, and who knows him altogether. It begins by speaking to us of our sins, with most considerate sympathy our Father, shews Himself aware of all the pollution we would confess. The cross of Christ supplies us with the self-condemnation we require; and with the condemnation speaks of tenderness and pardon. As we draw near, trembling with our guilt, not knowing how we shall ever utter it, we find it is already uttered. And the awful spell is broken, and we can speak of what it were worth worlds to utter; but what we could not utter were not the way smoothed for us by God's perfect knowledge of it.

“ My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine;
While, like a penitent, I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

And, all along the Christian life, when guilt, and shame, and sorrow have again overtaken us, we find the same blessedness in God's knowledge of our sins. We could not say all we desire to be said; but we can open

the heart to Him who reads it. Language is wholly vain to tell what we would have our God to know—the guilt and penitence of the returning sinner. We rejoice to feel the clear all-searching eye upon us: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*”

IV. I can only suggest to you to consider the power which our every good resolve derives from the fact that we can make it known to God. Such things crave an utterance; we are more faithful because we are pledged. But we may not speak of them to men; lest we become vain, lest after failure put us to shame, lest our good resolutions evaporate in mere talk. There is sweetness, too, and force in our uttering our love to God, our devotedness to Him. Of these things, also, we may not speak to our fellows, yet they must be breathed into some ear. We can ask our God to mark them, and we are confirmed in them by the fact that they have been noted of Him.

V. Notice, in conclusion, the blessedness of the fact that He who knows us thoroughly is our helper and our leader. Self-distrust lay deep in David below his consciousness of integrity. He knew of nothing against himself, but there might be evil ways in him which God perceived. From these he craved deliverance. He gives himself up as a little child to a father's guidance: “*Thou knowest what I want; keep watch and guard over me. Protect me against myself. I cannot guide myself; lead thou me in the way everlasting.*”

It is the living God who is brought before us here; who does not teach us simply, but leads us; who brings

us along the one path eternally marked out and good ; who "*besets us behind and before, and lays his hand upon us.*" We can go nowhither from His presence, nor escape from His Spirit. A map is something for the traveller, but children-travellers' as we are, we want the guide and controller of our way with us. "*See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*" There is one way, and only one, to blessedness and goodness. God's way is the same and everlasting. Why then are we wanderers? why are we not always making progress therein? Alas! there are ill ways within us; it is our way to be indolent, wilful, to run after deceitful pleasures, to stray in folly, to sit down in sloth: and our leader knows it; and He will search these out and bring us past our perils. God will help us; that is our confidence and joy. We shall go on, well and truly on, for we have One above to lead us.

There is not a fact about our God which is not the blessedness of the trusting. Things are told us about God that appear hard, solemnly appalling. He is righteous, and that is a hard word for guilty men to hear. He is holy, strong, true—these are awful words for polluted, weak, and faithless ones to hear. But we come to rest in them all, and be glad that He is just as He has revealed Himself. The all-searching, all-proving God—how can we delight in Him, when He must find in us so much that is evil? We do delight in Him as we learn that it would be our deepest misery to be left as we are; that it is our blessedness to have our ill corrected, and to be brought out of our own ways. To be "*led in the way everlasting,*" that is our need; which left un-

satisfied, we should go down in utter shame and sorrow ; and none can lead us but He who knows us altogether. Against ourselves we make our final cry to God, and in His charge we rest content.

To the all-searching, all-seeing God, Holy, Holy, Holy, Light and Love ; Father, Saviour, and ever-besetting Spirit, be honour and glory ; be our trust and gratitude, our ceaseless homage and obedience, world without end. Amen.

IN MEMORIAM

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AETAT. XX.



V.

THE TENDERNESS OF GOD'S RULE.

PSALM lxxxv. 10.

Mercy and truth are met together ; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

THE tenderness of God's strict rule, and the blessedness of its discovery—these are the two thoughts I would illustrate by our text. Strict regard for rule is of the essence of righteousness. It is by the revelation of law that God awakens in us the sentiment of righteousness ; by His undeviating adherence to law that sentiment is stimulated and confirmed. And if we push our investigations further ; if we say that God's law is based on eternal righteousness, that righteousness is prior to the law which expresses it, we are brought face to face with the law of God's own being. God's character is a law to Himself. His will could not make right wrong and wrong right ; righteousness rules His will ; His ways, His doings are controlled by the law of essential rectitude. Truth, again, is only the right in utterance. A man may sincerely speak what he thinks, and be faithful to all he says ; but unless his thought and speech are

correct, his sincerity is only sincere error, and his fidelity is but persistent falsehood. There is a prior reality, conformity to which is truth; and this reality is the law of all true thinking and speaking. Regard for rule is the essence of truth and righteousness.

The essence of tenderness is regard for persons. Love is no vague and general emotionalism; it is not softness of nature. It contemplates the wants of living beings and seeks to supply them. It enters into their feelings; it is sympathy, a taking part in that which others are experiencing. It aims and acts to secure another's well-being. God is righteous—He is moved and controlled by regard for what is right. God is love—He is moved and swayed by regard for you and me and all His creatures.

I have been thus careful in my definition, because just in proportion as we recognise the distinction between righteousness and tenderness, we shall be prepared for the teaching of our text, that in all God's operations these two are at one. We must not confound the two motives; the perfect man will have supreme regard for right, constant regard for other persons. But then neither must we separate them. One man may act from simple regard for what is right, another from simple regard for the welfare of his fellows. In action, however, these two men will be largely united: the wise statesman and the true philanthropist will seek the same things, and take very much the same way to secure them; as the world grows wiser and better, they will do so entirely. Still the character and motives of the two men would be distinct; we generally look upon them as opposite types. In God there is no such opposition;

God is one and His ways are one. In all He does He is moved by firmest regard for right, by tenderest regard for each one of us. In us, there is often a conflict of motive and feeling. Mercy seems to bid us to one way of treating men, truth seems to demand another. Righteousness may make us feel the opponents of men's peace. As we grow in godliness, this conflict dies not in us, and our feeling and conduct are felt harmonious, consistent. In God there is no such conflict at all; in Him we already behold "*mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissing each other.*"

Our text treats of this as a discovery. "*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*" as if they had "stood opposed before." How deeply true is this to human experience! We commonly think of God's righteousness as contrary to His mercy; we supplicate His regard for us, personally, to qualify His regard for right. How hard it is to recognise that law is the minister of love and love the fulfilling of law! Many never rise above the conception of law and gospel as opposed to each other; never appear to see how truly Christ came to fulfil all law. So strong is this feeling that a vast number of Bible readers and of earnest Christians bring in this opposition where the Bible never suggests it, perverting the words which speak of God as "*a just God and a Saviour,*" into "*a just God and yet a Saviour;*" instead of reading "*that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus,*" reading "*that he might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.*" The common interpolation of that word "*yet,*" which conveys a false notion, shews how deeply-seated is the

thought that tenderness and righteousness are essentially contrary to one another.

It is easy to see that their harmony must come upon us as a discovery, a reversal of our own thought about them. We are placed in this world to learn, and all knowledge is by fragments. We observe facts that appear isolated; it takes long observation and much experience for us to discern their harmony. Susceptibilities and ideas are developed in us one by one; we have to wait patiently, to wait on God, that He may reveal to us the unity of His own character in the unity of our nature and of His dealings with us.

Our being unfolds itself under the influence of love; the regard of others for us is our very first perception. We are cradled in protecting care; kind hearts anticipate our wants, and kind hands are always ministering to us. We feel ourselves the centre of a household's tenderness. With what carefulness are we shielded from the too-hard necessities of life. For many a year our burden is lightened because others are bearing it for us. As long as it is possible, the sterner realities of human existence are lovingly concealed from us. It comes as a shock to us to discover that there is another order in the world beside that of tenderness. The first punishment a child endures seems like the alienation of parental affection. Pain that a mother cannot alleviate, but which the child must bear; the withholding of that constant watchfulness which anticipates wants in order that the child may learn self-reliance; the entrance into a larger sphere of life, where all are not thinking only how to cherish him, where interests are various and the order of the great world is supreme—what wonder that

all this should seem to him like the denial of love? what wonder that there should be a sad contrast between the interferences of love and the cold strictness of law?

And then, beside the feebleness, out of regard for which the pressure of law is lightened and its perception postponed, there is the awakening of a sinful nature, a nature that has to be chastened and subdued, and by many a hard inward struggle conformed to law. Our selfishness, that arrogates all the tenderness of others as our right, comes into conflict with the larger righteousness. Our wilfulness has to be checked by the higher ruling will. We are careless as well as ignorant; we refuse the lessons set us, and our refusal makes them harder to learn, necessitates a severer discipline. The very hands that once warded off all our pains now inflict them; and the wilful heart resents the rule, and the careless passionate heart defiantly cries out upon the altered scheme of life, declares that love has ceased, and that the necessity of righteousness is pleaded only as a sanctimonious excuse for the absence of affection.

It is thus the conflict of human life begins; and it is God's object to bring us to the joyful discovery, wherein we rest for time and for eternity, that His regard for right and His regard for us are at one; that tenderness and righteousness are in harmony; that all the opposition is in our ignorance, our perverted feeling; that the strictest rule is the truest tenderness. This is His purpose in all the discipline of our experience; and it is continued, must be continued, till we see that "*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*"

Let us now consider some of the ways in which He reveals this to us.

I. I have already suggested that parental rule is one of these ways. The government of every pious household is, in measure, a revelation of the government of God. "Men are but children of a larger growth." We call ourselves the children of God, and this is much more than a merely endearing name. We have all a child's hold on God's affections, all a child's need of discipline and correction, all a child's power to grieve Him; and He has all a father's kind determination to train us in right. Just as you are tried by the perversity of your children, do you try God by your un-dutifulness, your murmuring and rebellion, your accusations of His providence, your questioning of His love. Your own adherence to the laws of your household; your own persistence in them, however your children may grieve over what they think your alienated affection; your own consciousness that it is not want of regard for them, but the truest love, that makes you insist upon what is right, may teach you some of the mysteries of God's dealing with you.

There comes a time in every family when the children must no longer be treated as babes, but as smaller men and women. Consciousness and reflection are awakening in them, and habits are daily forming that shall be the habits of their lives. They must now learn something more than your love for them; they must recognise right. They must be punished for ill-doing; they must be taught thoughtfulness, regard for one another; they must be trained in prudence and self-reliance. If the lesson be often hard for the child, it

is equally hard for the parent. You have often to put away their caresses, although these are more precious to you than to them. There may be no smile upon your face, though the deep love in your heart makes it pain to suppress it. You have to be patient under their misconceptions of you; you must endure that they shall think your heart is steeled against them. You know that it is not want of regard for them which constrains you to act thus. Because you love them so well, you must discipline them rightly. It would be no mercy towards them to be regardless of truth; a firm rule may distract your household, but carelessness would be worse ultimate distraction, and out of righteousness shall spring a deeper and an enduring peace. Can you not read in all this the secret of God's dealing with you? His regard for you is also the meaning of His strictness. The chastening stroke, the constant call for submission, the hiding of His face, are in Him also the tokens of a love wiser than you yet can comprehend, but which your own fatherly heart might make you trust. "*We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*"

II. The tenderness of God's strict rule is revealed to us again in the experience of life. It is hard to say whether most injury is done by over-strictness or by over-indulgence. The man who is impelled only by regard for the abstract right; who has no consideration for the persons that are about him; who makes no allowance for temptation or for frailty; who visits with equal rigour sins of ignorance and depravity; who never has a kind word for those who are weary, and does not know how

to pardon, will drive his dependents to recklessness, and sink them in despair. His children will go out into life restrained by no unseen ties of memory; the sanctity of kindness will be absent from their souls; all the influences that come from the certainty that he cares for them—will be grieved by their transgressions, and will rejoice in their goodness—will be wanting. They will be but poorly fortified against temptation, for the bond of tenderness strengthens the hold of principle. But, on the other hand, how much evil have we seen following on affection that never cared for truth and righteousness? He who is ever shielding persons from the consequences of their ill-doing, who knows not how to punish, who can but pity and cannot condemn, works mischief by his very love. It is not love at all, indeed, this softness of disposition untempered by firm regard for right. It is not regard for men and women, it is but regard for their feelings. Their character, their well-being, all that future during which it will be of so immense importance whether their wills have been rightly controlled, and their habits rightly formed, are sacrificed to the desire to secure their passing ease. Who are so wretched as spoiled children? How in after years they curse the fondness that was a poor pretence of love! In all the woes that follow on ill-regulated passions, and unchecked wilfulness, and pettishness fostered, and pride ministered to, in untruthfulness confirmed and selfishness indulged, till it has grown a torture and a tyranny, we may read the utter cruelty of mere fondness, the essential falsity of personal regard that is not founded on regard for right.

What poor work we have sometimes made of our

direction of others ! Now we are simply severe in our judgment, and now we give play only to our fond affections ; at one time we forget that men have hearts to be wounded, and again we forget that they have consciences to be depraved. How often is our over-strictness followed by over-indulgence ? We do not think that a broken heart may be the beginning of a holy and ever peaceful life, while a character we have weakened or demoralised can never wholly be recovered to all God intended it to be. We find that the dearest love may mislead and ruin ; unregulated affection is a shameful, a destructive thing. Thus are we able to perceive a new meaning in the strict rule of God, in the law that whatsoever a man soweth he is made to reap. We see kindness in punishment ; because He is so tender, He is oftentimes so stern. Regard for right is the truest personal regard. God would shield men from woes unnumbered, from the confusion of an unregulated will, from the conflict of passion, from the loathing that follows self-indulgence ; and, therefore, has He made His laws so severe and certain, and, therefore, does He subdue us to His laws. Truth is not opposed to mercy ; where there is no righteousness love works destruction. The experience of life prepares us to turn in gladness to our God, in gladness to rest in the rule of Him in whom we see that "*mercy and truth are met together ; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*"

III. This revelation, again, is granted in prayer. The latter verses of this psalm are an answer to the former verses. The Psalmist, in some trouble, has been supplicating God's favourable regard. He asks God to interfere on the behalf of His people, as He had

interfered before. "*Thou wast favourable to thy land; thou didst bring back the captivity of Jacob. Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.*" God hears and answers the prayer; but how? There is in the closing verses no hint of altered circumstances; God has opened the Psalmist's eyes, and he is content to bear them such as they are, in the assurance that there is mercy in the trial of the people. "*Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation.*" He will hear what God, the Lord, will speak; and in his waiting he finds salvation already at hand. That which he had supplicated comes by no way of interference; it is there, in the distressful circumstances themselves. "*Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him;*" they have but to open their eyes and see it. "*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*" Before he called, God had answered him; the favourable regard was the regard of righteousness.

How often to us do such answers come? We ask God out of His personal love to us to deliver us from some trial; even while we are praying, we see His personal love to us in the trial. The tender regard has not to be won, it is there in that which we thought shewed its absence. We mourn under some appointment of life, thinking God is punishing us in it for our sins; as we pray to Him, we learn that we are not being punished, but chastened. We ask that God's anger may be taken away and we forgiven; we see that we are already forgiven, and that what we thought was anger, was only the fidelity of love.

One of the great ends of prayer is thus to reveal to us *the tenderness of God*. The order of human life, with

its partings and its pains, the law by which we suffer, appears to us in a new aspect. God's mercy is seen, not in interfering for our sakes with the order of His Providence; that order is itself most merciful. It were no tenderness to deliver us out of it: the tenderness is in His faithful adherence to it. My brethren, let us learn that prayer is then most fully answered when it is changed into entire trust; let us learn that God's tenderness is revealed, not in saving us from tribulation, but in saving us by tribulation. The great scheme of life with all its wrestlings, its anxieties and tears, is ordained with the closest regard for each one of us. I dare not ask that God will deal with me other than He is dealing; I must ask that He will clear my vision to see His tenderness in all; that He will deepen my trust in Him, so that I may recognise His love; that He will strengthen me for submission and for blessedness. He who feels that the development of holy character is of infinitely more importance than the obtaining of any of his wishes, will learn that in events not as he would have them, but as God has eternally ordained them, there is the truest tenderness. The law of all the Universe is a law ordained to perfect God's will in me; and God in His regard for this is showing His personal regard for me. The truest, most trustful prayer we can offer is that of Christ: "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,*"—this plea for God's personal regard is permitted us, we must offer it. "*Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done*"—the merging of our will in His, assured that God is then most tender to us when He does what He has designed to do.

IV. Once more, the tenderness of God's strict law is

revealed to us in the gospel of Christ. It is personal regard for man which we see preeminently in Jesus ; yet who, so much as He, makes us feel the constraining bond of righteousness? He is filled with human sympathy; in the fulness of His pity He makes their sorrows, and their shame, and their struggles His own; but the influence of his association is to make men feel more and more that they cannot escape the rule of God. He delivers them from the penalties of law; but it is to awaken in them a reverence for it, deeper and more solemn than any experience of penalty can be. He frees them from its pains by transforming its painfulness into an entire devotion to it. He shews them that personal regard is not at variance with regard for right; for the Father, who loved the Son, did not out of regard for Him turn aside from strictest law. The gospel is a revelation of God's love—is it the Father's love for Christ that it reveals? *“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”* The greatness of the Father's love is revealed in the constraint of the commandment. Is it the Father's love to us the gospel manifests? The effect of His love is to make us honour His righteousness wholly, claim it as our own, and seek to be ever more and more understanding, and submitting to, and adoring it. Is God's righteousness often painful and hard in its necessities? The Son of His love was released from none of its hard painfulness. Nor is it promised to us that we shall be released from this. Only the pain is no longer regarded as the witness of God's anger against us; it

is the taking up of Christ's cross, the filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ.

We have been taught, my brethren, to look upon the gospel as the way in which God's righteousness and love are brought into harmony. It is much more the revelation of their eternal harmony. God's righteousness did not need to be reconciled to His love; it is our foolish, wicked thought of opposition between them which needs to be corrected. And it is corrected in the gospel. Christ came to reveal the Father to us; to show us that the God who is love is the strict and righteous ruler; to vindicate God's righteousness against our foolish charges that it is unmerciful; to show us that because He is love, He is strict and righteous in His rule; and that He, the Son of God, who is most persuaded of the love, is most submissive to the rule. It is as we see the only-begotten and well-beloved One claiming as the seal of His Sonship and the witness of God's favour, that very obedience, that submission and suffering which we so often lament as a hard necessity in God's rule of us, that we make the great discovery that tenderness and righteousness are not opposed as we thought, but are eternally at one; that it is out of God's personal regard for us that He ever acts in undeviating regard to His rule.

And then there dawns on us the overwhelming conception that surrounding law is surrounding love; that law is the highest expression of love. We look around us expecting to see law reigning everywhere; nor do we look in vain. What once we thought the kind interferences of others on our behalf that we might be shielded from the hard necessities of rule, are now seen

themselves but the manifestation of a higher law. The law of motherly kindness nursed us when we were infants; we learn how wise and careful was the forethought that watched over our childhood. It was not by chance that our feebleness was defended; what we once thought casual and spasmodic movements of the parental heart are seen to be the operation of a Divine parental order. Our childhood was not shocked by too early discoveries of the burden of life, for others bore our burden for us. The law of human anxiety and suffering was upon us from our very birth; by the operation of the social law, the Divine ordinance of vicariousness, we were saved from anxiety and suffering by others' endurance of this for us. Human love and tenderness are exalted as we see in them the proofs of forethought, of patient, resolute and earnest care. And God's own love becomes reverend and awful, when we mark its eternal sources, its far-reaching sweep, its ceaseless condescension to all the minutiae of our experience. To see a law of love is to discover the forethought of love; it is to find that tenderness is not, as we once fancied it, dependent on our presence, the creature of our prayers; but that an eternal love regarded us, and prepared for us our dwelling-place, and is watching over our discipline, and appointing our every circumstance, and leading us on to its own perfect fulfilment.

V. The closing verses of the Psalm declare the blessed effects of this discovery in a true and fruitful, in a trusting, an intelligent and obedient life; in a life hallowed by God's smile and crowned with His constant benediction. For one moment I would ask you to notice the last verse—“*Righteousness shall go before him; and*

shall set us in the way of his steps." The image is that of God coming down the course of His own ordination, and our being placed in His pathway, ready to receive Him, found expectant of Him, prepared for Him.

The end of God's rule is to bring us into harmony with His purpose and prepare us for all that He has intended for us. Reverence for God's order, the knowledge of the way in which He works, will fit us for life; there will be no shock in sorrow, no temptation in gladness, when for either we are already prepared. There are wondrous indications of what God will do in the life of every one of us if only we will be on the outlook for them; and many a premonition, true as instinct, comes to the spirit in sympathy with His rule.

To stand "*in the way of God's steps;*" is not this to reap all the blessedness of life? to be saved from error and confusion? Reverence and submission are our true blessedness. O, that you all would learn how true and tender is God's rule of you, and that righteousness and love are at one; that you would come to the blessedness of loving the rule because it is the rule of love; of trusting the tenderness because it is faithful, based on eternal right. Then might we welcome you to the labour and temptations of this life, assured that you would stand safe amidst its trials, and that your work would be earnest and helpful and glorious; or we might say farewell to you when dying, and bid you out into the unknown future, assured that for all that might meet you there you were prepared. To know the tenderness of God's rule, and the truthfulness of His love, is to be fit for this or any world; for God is supreme in all; and His "*righteousness goes before him to set us in the way of his steps.*" Amen.



VI.

TRUST AND TROUBLE.

PSALM lxxiii. 13.

*Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in
innocency.*

TRUST in God our support amid the perplexing problems of human life—this is the subject I purpose illustrating from this Psalm. I say, our support amid the perplexing problems of life rather than our answer to them; for, as you will see, the question which troubled Asaph—the prosperity of the wicked and the tribulation of the righteous—is not really answered here at all. The very thing he saw when he entered the sanctuary, the swift and sure destruction of the wicked, does but increase our perplexity. With our affections quickened by the gospel; with a love for all men breathed into us by the Spirit of Christ, a love that under His inspiration rises to sacrifice, so that we “*could wish ourselves accursed for the sake of our brethren according to the flesh;*” taught in the gospel, how deeply, how truly God loves them, that for them He could even give His Son to die; it is to us a baffling mystery that He

should "*set the wicked in slippery places,*" that the very prosperity He gives them should but prepare them for desolation, and that they should at length be "*utterly consumed with terrors.*"

Nor even in the Gospel are all the mysteries of human life explained to us. I think, indeed, that Asaph's question is answered for us, as it was not answered for him. In the 19th century of the Christian faith, we are not quite so perplexed as was he, when we see the righteous often troubled and the wicked often prosperous. The gospel redeems us from selfishness; it makes us unwilling, because we are the sons of God, to be merely happy; it impels us rather, because we "*know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" to take our share of the common woes of a sinful world. It tells us that God is not "*slack*" concerning judgment and promise, as some men count slackness, but is "*long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" God suspends the doom of the ungodly and the reward of the just, for He "*would have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*" The innocent suffer with the guilty, often suffer for them, that so the guilty, spared, may be led by God's goodness to repentance; to be helpful in such a ministry is an abundant recompense for all its pain. This the gospel teaches us; it tells us that we have not "*cleansed our hearts in vain, and washed our hands in innocency;*" for that the fellowship of the righteous Saviour is the fellowship of the Man of Sorrows. But it brings us face to face with deeper mysteries than those which it solves. If we ask the reason of this—why God has so constituted the world as that all this is true; if

we are not content with seeing how God acts, but go on to inquire why He acts thus ; then there is no voice, nor any that answers us. This is all we get for response ; so hath God willed it, and so it is.

What then is God doing for us in the gospel? If, as every mystery of life is solved, we are brought face to face with a deeper mystery, is not the burden of life made more insupportable, the gospel itself most intolerable of all? My brethren, God is doing for us in the gospel what He did for Asaph in the sanctuary ; He is bringing us to trust in Him. He is confirming our faith, enlarging our conceptions of His righteousness, calling us to a broader view of His counsel, deepening our confidence that He is good. Every answer He gives to our questionings is a blessed answer ; every fact He explains to us, every truth He reveals, makes us feel more and more that His love is fuller, and His purpose profounder, and His righteousness vaster than we had thought. And thus, though the answer to every mystery is itself a deeper mystery ; it is also a fuller revelation of His goodness and His grace. And so we can trust Him although we cannot comprehend Him. We are patient in our ignorance ; we can bear the unsolved problem, assured that when that is made clear to us, the answer will, like all the other answers He has given us, shew us that He is "*glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders.*"

God does not explain everything to us as we should wish it explained ; but He is continually shewing us, that He has good and wise reasons for all He does. The question, which it is profanity to ask, but which we are sometimes impelled to ask, "*How doth God know ?*

and is there knowledge in the most High?" is answered for us. We see a purpose though we cannot comprehend it. There is knowledge in God, God does know, and that is enough for us. There is no mystery in life so dark, but we can bear it, if only we are persuaded that God is pursuing His purpose in it. It was the suggestion that God could not be discerning between the righteous and the wicked, which grieved Asaph to the heart, and pricked his veins. When he learnt that God was taking note of all; then he said, "*Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*"

I dwell for a moment on these things, because I am quite aware that in attempting to support souls despondent under the mystery of trouble, I may be leaving unsolved even weightier questions than I may answer; I may seem to be answering one mystery by a mystery yet darker. But our meditation will not be in vain, if any one of you can but be led to a firmer trust in God. We cannot understand all that God is doing; enough for us if we can recognise that He is doing all things, can be assured that He is doing all things well. God answered Asaph's difficulty by showing him that he was not taking account of all the problem. It is thus He answers us. The gospel has revealed many facts in human life which we forget when we say, just because we are not comfortable, "*Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed mine hands in innocency.*" There are reasons in what is perplexing us. Though we may not understand them all, God knows them, and that is our support.

Notice I. how forgetfulness of God leads us to chafe under the painful dispensations of human life; and

II. some considerations which may help us to trust that God is good in ordaining for us the painful dispensations of human life.

I. Notice how forgetfulness of God leads us to chafe under the painful dispensations of human life.

It is an honest confession which we find in the third verse: "*I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*" Doubtless Asaph was perfectly familiar with the pious sayings in which the experience of the godly is gathered up and afterwards repeated by others. Doubtless he could have talked as sagely as we about the prosperity of the wicked being transient, of the Lord's loving whom He chastens, and scourging every son whom He receives. But the feebleness of his hold upon these truths is seen, in that he cannot bear their actual sight. When he "*sees*" the prosperity of the foolish; when the wicked flaunt gaily by him; when he marks their pride and self-complacency, that seem to laugh his lowly trust in God to scorn; then he finds that his maxims do not serve him much, he gives way to envy of them. He needs more than maxims, however sage, to preserve him from rebelliousness; not till he "*goes into the sanctuary of God,*" not till he stands in God's own presence, and is searched by God's own Spirit, does the truth, so easily uttered, really live within him.

It is the actual stress of life, contact with all its hard and trying realities, that tests our faith. It is very easy when we are gay as any, glad as any; when we have, if not all that heart can wish, yet all that man can reasonably expect, to congratulate ourselves that we are full of faith in God; easy then to talk

about "*the much tribulation,*" through which "*we must enter the kingdom.*" We should blush, in our times of comfort, to think that we could envy the wicked; we should resent such a charge as unfounded and unworthy. We can talk well about God's favour being our chief joy, when we have, together with peace of conscience, prosperity, and health, and reputation. We can pride ourselves upon the integrity of our hearts, and the cleanness of our hands, when the sight of others' success is not putting our lowliness and sorrow to scorn. But how is it with us, when faith is all that is left us; when we are thrown back upon our own words, called to show that "*wisdom is good*" without "*an inheritance;*" when the buoyancy of others' health does but remind us of our own pain and weakness; when we are passed in the race of life by those whom we have been wont to hold in light esteem; when we have to witness the gladness and the triumph of the very transgressors of whom we have hitherto only thought with pity? Can we bear to "*see*" the prosperity of the wicked while we are ourselves in adversity? Will our faith in God bear this strain? No maxims will help us here; no lessons learnt from a book will now serve us. Under this severe test, we often painfully find that the faith, on which we prided ourselves, has become an empty tradition; we blush to find ourselves envying even the foolish; chafing and fretting, because we have not, in addition to God's favour and the promises of the gospel, their strength and fatness, their prosperity and peace.

Notice, too, how envy grows into self-righteousness. The words, "*Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency,*" do not go very

deep, considered as an expression of the experience of a godly man. They suggest one who is pretty well satisfied with himself, if he has nothing to reproach himself with; who is content to be free from blame, with very little thought of a higher life to which God is calling him—a life of patience and faith, a life of entire dependence upon God. A little while ago, and he might have been ashamed to compare himself with others; he might have professed himself ready for all the discipline by which God would purge him; might have acknowledged to himself no lower aspiration than that God would search his heart, reveal to him what of unbelief and perversity and worldliness yet remained in him, and Himself cleanse him of all this. My brethren, when we ask God to perfect His work in us, we must not forget what we have prayed for. The answer to our petition may be in that very distress and humiliation which seem to us to be mocked by the prosperity and self-confidence of the wicked.

Mark, again, the flippant self-satisfaction, the deep distrust in God which breathes in verses 10—14. The suggestion is, 'We good men ought not to be treated thus; we are not being dealt with righteously.' And this, just because God does not give them as much wealth, as much power, as vigorous a body, as healthful senses, as others have. A yet deeper impiety lurks here; "*they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?*" Does God Almighty know what He is doing? These things are put broadly, irreverent as the words may seem; for it is well for us to learn what is the real impiety of all our chafing and murmuring under the painful dispensations of human

life. It is not perhaps thus that we openly speak. Asaph must not be understood as actually cherishing these thoughts; he is describing a current of speculation into which he was borne, revealing the tendency and real character of his murmuring; and he is startled when he has put his thought into words, and says, "*If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.*" We should not dare to utter the doubt that is in our hearts, and yet what dark doubts may be really there. If laid upon a couch of pain and weakness, we ask, "Why am I deprived of my powers? I am not aware that I deserved this; I never misused my health that I now should lose it:"—if a father, bereaved of his children, should say, "Why has God thought me unfit to bring them up? I am sure I should not have been a foolish parent, that He has taken my little ones away:"—if in anything we ask, "How have we merited to be dealt with thus?" what is this but to judge the Judge of all the earth; to measure the deep eternal righteousness of God by our own poor petty notions of what ought to be?

God has told us again and again, that "*his thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways.*" He has taught us that His righteousness takes in issues infinitely too vast to be measured merely by what we see on earth. That easy thought to which we leap, that the innocent ought not to suffer, and that men's prosperity ought to be proportioned to their relative deserts, is the very thought which God has again and again condemned as hasty and false. He is condemning it in the facts of everyday life; whatever we may think ought to be, it is not true that comfort and prosperity go according to

desert. He has taught us that we are in an order of things, in which self-sacrificing love is the highest manifestation of righteousness. When some told Christ of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, He said, "*Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" In the cross of Christ, God has finally and utterly condemned the notion, that suffering is proportioned to guilt; and in calling us to be Christians, He is calling us to take our cross and go after Christ, telling us that as Christ suffered, so will His disciples suffer too. And yet, despite all this, we are again and again asserting the same selfish, idle maxims; we are saying that God does govern this world merely by rewards and punishments; or, at least, that so He ought to govern the world. For, "*we are envious at the foolish, when we see the prosperity of the wicked.*" If we are not so happy as we think we are good, the murmur comes, "*Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.*" We are shocked at what God has taught us to expect; a prosperity which the goodness of the prosperous man does not explain; a tribulation of God's people, which their wickedness does not explain. All doubt as to the providence of God, all questioning of His ways, all murmuring and chafing, really imply this. O, my brethren, let us take the lessons of life, the revelation of the Gospel. As we see in the cross the revelation of the righteousness of God, let the cross teach us that He is right, and good, and wise, and kind in the much prosperity of the wicked and the much tribulation of the

righteous. Whatever may be obscure in God's ways, this at least is not obscure. He does not judge men in the hasty way in which we judge them. His counsel takes in other ends than merely to make the righteous happy, and the unrighteous unhappy. He has a purpose in His forbearance with the guilty; He "*endures with much long suffering,*" and "*does them good*" continually, that He may bring them to Himself. He has a purpose in the painful discipline He often appoints the godly; to make them purer, holier, stronger men. Above all, He would bring them into fellowship with His own Son, who Himself bare our infirmities and took our sufferings; on whom was laid "*the chastisement of our peace,*" and by whose "*stripes we are healed.*"

II. Notice some considerations which may help us to trust that God is good in ordaining for us the painful dispensations of human life.

Perhaps we could not have borne prosperity. When Asaph went into the sanctuary of God and saw the end of the wicked, he learned that they had been "*set in slippery places;*" that the "*pride*" which "*compassed them about as a chain,*" that their having "*more than heart could wish,*" had but sealed them up against the day of "*desolation,*" and the "*terrors*" that should "*utterly consume*" them. Because they were prosperous, they were self-confident, and their self-confidence was their destruction. And then there opens upon him an awful vision of what prosperity might have done for him. With the memory of his sinful mumuring upon him, he feared that he might have grown sinfully proud. The heart which tribulation had grieved, would have been hardened by prosperity. So "*foolish*" was

he, and "ignorant" in his adversity, "as a beast before God;" what would he have been if he had known no trouble, if his strength had been firm? A dark abyss or unbelief yawns before him, from which he was only held back by the hand he had thought so stern, but which he now sees to have been the firm, kind hand of a Father. "His feet were almost gone; his steps had well-nigh slipped." He leans upon the chastening hand; God's chastening grace alone had saved him. Not now to prosperity does he look, not to his own cleanness of heart, but to God. "I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me with thy right hand." God has been wiser than he; to God's counsel henceforth he commits himself. Trembling, as at an awful peril he has just escaped, barely escaped, he gives himself to God's guidance; "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."

Stand for a moment, my brethren, with Asaph; ask yourselves if sorrow has made you murmur, how certainly would prosperity have destroyed you. Then pass into a holier than Asaph's sanctuary, the sacred shrine of Calvary. There other truths, brighter and more glorious still, will shine upon you.

We cannot accept as final the answer which was given to Asaph; the gospel reveals to us a sublimer truth. The end of the wicked he saw was their destruction; their restoration is the end for which we are taught to hope and labour. Think now how hopeless would be their restoration, if all the suffering of life were apportioned to them, and the righteous were never troubled. If all personal suffering were seen by us to be God's judgment on personal transgression, then the

wicked would be consciously doomed, openly doomed, divinely, irrevocably doomed. Perdition would already have overtaken them, and at every fresh affliction, they would sink into worse despair. It is to save them from this end that God does them good; He would "*spare*" them, that so "*His goodness may lead them to repentance;*" He would save them from the hopeless agony of seeing themselves already condemned. It is the grace of God that restores the ungodly, not His punishments. God is "*enduring with much long-suffering;*" shall not the Sons of God "*endure with much long-suffering*" too? This it is which will keep us from envying the foolish, when we see the prosperity of the wicked. The habit of judging them will not keep us from envy; compassion for them will. As we see that God in His goodness is seeking to win them to Himself, that He is not soon provoked by their pride and self-confidence, and is never hopelessly estranged from them, we come to a gentler, holier mind. Instead of "*Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning;*" we shall rather say, "*Therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God,*" "*who will have all men to be saved,*" "*and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*"

Enter again the sanctuary, and look on Christ. "*Holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.*" He was the "*man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*" Age after age, men awaited the coming of the blessed One; and when He came, "*the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay his head.*" Trouble and anguish were His; and at

the end the cruel cross. And this was the Christ, the Son and revelation of the blessed God ; of Him so tried, so weary, so scorned, God said, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" Who now shall dare to say that He "*has cleansed his heart in vain, and washed his hands in innocency ?*" Who will not choose to be with Christ in humiliation and distress ? God would call us to a higher life, a life that can only be reached through tribulation and endurance. God has better things to give His children than prosperity. It is better to be brave than rich ; patience is better than comfort ; it is better to trust in God than to enjoy the confidence of men ; better to stand undaunted amid distress, saying, "*I know whom I have believed,*" than to enjoy a success which wins the admiration of the world. "*Where I am,*" says Christ, "*there shall also my servant be,*" with Him in lowliness, and meekness, and suffering. "*The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord: it is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.*"

Nor can we understand the meaning of life at all, while we are thinking only of ourselves. God would have us take our part in the restoring of the wicked to Himself. He is calling us to helpfulness of one another, fitting us to share in His divine work of "*wiping away tears from off all faces.*" Who can comfort but he who has sorrowed ? grief patiently borne is a lesson to all the world ; we cannot tell who will be the better for our meek endurance. Even on earth, it is true, that they who are greatly helpful to others are they "*who have come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes,*

and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They who "*suffer with Christ,*" do "*reign with him,*" even on earth; many are blessed by the patient suffering of one tried and trusty soul. Will you not suffer much, if so you may be fitted for much consolation, if so you may make your way to the conscience and heart of others? The lessons that we learn in our endurance give us a power over men that nothing else can give; give us an energy, a wisdom, and a faith that find their fruitful issues where we little think. And in the after-world, of which we know so little, who shall say what blessed spheres of ministry may be opened up to him who here has suffered with Christ, and there shall reign with Him? "The noble army of martyrs," rest assured, is a noble army of ministering spirits; and the lessons of earth will not be forgotten in heaven. To be near Christ in suffering is to be near Him in joyful energy of helpfulness, in the patience and the wisdom, the courage and the trust, by which souls are saved, and which fit for "*ministering for them who shall be heirs of salvation.*"

Thus does God bring us to trust in Him, and support us amid the painful dispensations of human life. He does not explain everything to us; He does not show us precisely what shall be the blessedness of our tribulation; He does not give us to see exactly for whose sakes we suffer, to whom our sufferings shall be blessed. But He has told us that there are gracious, holy reasons, and that these reasons are with Him. In the life of His own dear Son, He has sealed His truth and goodness, in wringing out "*waters of a full cup*" to His people; for He wrung them out to Christ. Oh, let us learn this lesson; let us learn that it is because we are sons of

God that He so deals with us; for that it is "*more blessed to give than to receive,*" and that suffering is the pledge of His favour.

" Rejoice we are allied
 To that which doth provide
 And not partake, effect and not receive!
 A spark disturbs our clod,
 Nearer we hold of God
 Who gives, than of His tribes who take, I must believe.

" Then, welcome each rebuff
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,
 Each sting that bids not sit, nor stand, but go;
 Be our joys three parts pain!
 Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
 Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

". Praise be Thine,
 I see the whole design,
 I, who saw Power, see Love now perfect too;
 Perfect I call Thy plan,
 Thanks that I was a man,
 Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt do."



VII.

JONAH: THE SINFULNESS AND CURE OF ABSORBING PASSION.

JONAH iv. 9—12.

And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

THE position of the book of Jonah in the Old Testament canon is a fact of some apologetic value. It is found, a standing rebuke of intolerance, among the sacred writings of a most intolerant people. Intense nationality has always been a Jewish characteristic. In the earlier history of the people, their prophets were exclusively national. In later times, the national religion had degenerated almost entirely into intolerance. Yet, withal, this book was recognised and preserved as Divine. We need not commit ourselves to any theory of a miraculous formation of the canon; but this fact is worth contemplating. We say nothing of any Divine interference with circumstances for the preservation of

the sacred parchments; but there must have been a Divine influence in the nation. God's Spirit lifted readers and guardians of the Holy Writings above prevailing national sentiment; He who gave to His people a succession of men, able to recognise and value all Divine teaching, was thus vindicating for this book its place in the records of His revelation.

It is because it exposes and rebukes the sin of intolerance that this book has been preserved; this constitutes its claim to be in the Bible, and has secured its place here. Jonah was a Jewish prophet, but his words to Israel have been lost. We read, 2 Kings xiv. 25, that Jeroboam the Second "*restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.*" This is all that is recorded of the prophet's relations with his own people. But for Nineveh, we should know little more of Jonah than his name.

The reason of Jonah's disobedience to the heavenly voice—the voice of God which still is heard directing us to duty, and which once heard can never be mistaken, how hard soever, how unwelcome soever the task to which it bids—is boldly and frankly told in the history. No tenderness for the prophet's reputation is allowed to veil his sin; exclusiveness is laid bare in all its baseness and malignity. It would be quite possible to find gentler reasons for his flight to Tarshish. We might have found such a reason in timidity, the shrinking of a dweller in an obscure town of a petty nation from entering the proud and stately city to rebuke it; or in the reluctance

of one to denounce and threaten, whose pleasant work it had been to utter messages of deliverance. But Jonah has no such mild excuses for himself. He was not a timid man; the history sets him forth as one of turbulent spirit and obstinate force of will. He did not shrink from threatening; it was quite a congenial task for him to denounce woes against Nineveh. The thing that God did in sparing the city "*displeased him exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was this not my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.*" That was the secret of his disobedience. He was indignant that the Lord should care for the haughty heathen city; indignant that he, a Jewish prophet, should be charged to call an alien people to repentance, rather let the doom come down upon them without warning and without hope. There is no room to weaken the force of these words; there is no need for us to offer other explanations of the prophet's conduct. National antipathy and religious exclusiveness will account for it all. Even to-day bitter words * are spoken, and bitter deeds are wrought, in England and by Englishmen, against alien races, without shame or shrinking, that would be utterly intolerable if said and done against our fellow-countrymen or our neighbours. The "horrors of war" are mitigated when white men are in conflict with each other; but the policy of extermination is justified,

* This sermon was written in 1865. Those who remember how the pride of the "Anglo-Saxon race" was embittered by the Indian Mutiny and the American war will perceive the relevancy of these sentences.

and pleasant names are given to foul and cowardly offences, when the white man is ranged against the black. "Negrophobia" is respectable; the "negrophiles" are those on whom "society" pours out its scorn. Of what, too, is not religious exclusiveness capable? The belief that God cares, or ought to care, only for an elect few; that the rest of the world are allowed, or should be allowed, to go on in their sin unwarned, unpleaded with, unhopd for, and unsaved, has in itself any possibilities of cold cruelty. If all who profess the creed are not cold and cruel, it is because the personal influence of Christ is stronger than their unhappy logic.

Equally marked in the history is God's determination to expose the workings and rebuke the sin of exclusiveness. Surely there were gentle men in Israel, to whom the woes of Nineveh would have been the "burden," and who would have rejoiced in Nineveh's repentance. Surely there were more reverent prophets in Israel, who could have been more easily persuaded to a mission of mercy to an alien city. Why was the hard and obstinate Jonah called and forced to a work so uncongenial to him; a work that goaded him to wildest turbulence, and called out his bitterest passion? It might have been the same thing for Nineveh to have listened to a better man; their faith and repentance might have been aroused, and their doom averted. But it would not have been the same thing for Jonah to have gone out into eternity with his bad heart unsearched and uncorrected. We can now read, not only how a proud and wicked heathen city received a messenger from Jehovah, and "*repented at his preaching*," we have God's solemn rebuke of a common sin, and many a man may find here searching and

humbling lessons. Jonah rebelled against the mission appointed him, but he had to fulfil it. "Man is immortal till his work is done," even though sometimes death would be more welcome than to do it. The prophet did not perish in his disobedience, though it brought him so nigh to death. The rescued prophet heard again the voice of the Lord, "*Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.*" For to draw up to the gates of death is not to be released from the necessity of obedience; danger and deliverance dissolve not duty. No; nor does even death itself. The voices that men hear in the depths of the soul, the truth that God binds as a burden on them, go with them into eternity. To do His work is our sole discharge. We may have our hours of faithlessness, when we seek to escape from God and God's bidding, careless whither we may go, if only we can silence the unwelcome voice. But every true man will rejoice that escape was made impossible; that he has been followed in his self-will, and finally delivered from it; preserved in dark prison-houses, and brought out at length to find the unheeded voice sounding still the same, setting him to the duty that waited for him through his estrangement, and still waits, demanding to be done. Moreover, it is only by obeying God's bidding that we can be purged from the sinfulness that makes obedience unwelcome. God's chosen servants have to yield to Him, though often in the yielding they are searched and convicted of startling wickedness. The prophet's preaching illustrates the prophet's experience. God was calling the preacher of repentance to repent himself. But for the firm hand of God upon him, Jonah had been destroyed.

The broadly human features of the book of Jonah are, however, of deeper interest than the merely prophetic story. In the working of Jonah's anger we see the characteristics of all absorbing passion; and God's mode of curing him is an example of the myriad influences by which He restores the self-absorbed to true and healthy life. Notice

I. The sinfulness of absorbing passion.

Its sinfulness is illustrated in Jonah's contempt of life. Nineveh was not to be destroyed as he had prophesied, and his pride is wounded, and he says, "*Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.*" A man's worth may be measured by the reverence he has for his life. "To live," says Sir Thomas Browne, "to live, indeed, is to be ourselves; which being not only a hope, but an evidence, in noble believers, 'tis all one to lie in St. Innocent's churchyard as in the sands of Egypt, ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever, and as content with six foot as the Moles of Adrianus." "Ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever,"—they are noble words and breathe the very spirit of the Bible. "*With thee is the fountain of life,*" says the Psalmist, in highest adoration of God. Christ, in claiming for Himself that He is One with the Father, speaks of the life that is in Him, and which He has power to give, as the proof of this. "*As the Father raiseth up the dead, and giveth life to them; even so the Son giveth life to whom he will. As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, because he is the Son of man.*" It is well for Christians to be aware of the real impiety that lurks under a longing for death,

and weariness of the life which, day by day, God is bestowing on us here. The gospel, which delivers us from a coward fear of dying, was never intended to foster an equally coward fear of living.

“ My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore.”

He who brought immortality to light through the gospel, brought also life to light. He claimed for God this daily being, wherein men toil and sorrow, and are disappointed; and filled it with a spirit and a purpose, a presence and a power, that makè it sacred as any after-life can be. To despise this high gift of God,—to set it in the balance against disappointments, or labours, or unwelcome duties, and the common daily demands; because of sadness or weariness, to stretch out hopeless hands and long for death,—is not only the mark of a coward spirit, it is also dark impiety. Such a scorn of God’s rich blessedness is scorn of God Himself.

The sinfulness of absorbing passion is seen again in that it works insincerity. Even after Jonah has recognised that God is sparing the city, he still affects to believe that it will be overthrown. He hastens out of it lest he should be partaker of its plagues; he will not dwell in a builded house, for fear of being crushed under its walls, but makes himself a booth. He sat down “ *till he might see what would become of the city;*” pretending, that is, that he is awaiting its destruction. He would appear to Nineveh, and would persuade himself that he is still expectant of the end he had foretold.

What impiety! we are ready to say; what hateful affectation and insincerity! But is it very uncommon?

Have we never continued to cherish expectations that we well knew would never be fulfilled? still pursued an object to which we once gave ourselves, conscious all the while that we were living an unreal life? Do we never try to live again in the dreams of our youth? Are we always ready to listen to the voice that tells us that the old hope, the old passion is dead, and urges us to the duty of to-day? Passion becomes an "old hysterical mock disease." How much of life is wasted because of our refusal to acknowledge that we have outgrown the expectations of the past, or that time and change have swept us far beyond them!

Again, the selfishness of an absorbing passion is illustrated in Jonah's contempt of the men of Nineveh. He will not share in their repentance; he will not encourage their hope that God may yet turn away His fierce anger, nor join them in their gratitude that God has spared them. He shuts himself up alone to brood over his anger. God has falsified the mere letter of the prophecy which he forced Jonah to utter. That is all he can think of. He foresaw this: he thought it would be so, and so it has proved.

All passion tends to arrogance. Self-absorption means scorn of our fellows. In the eagerness of one desire, we come to despise all ordinary pursuits. Hope puffs us up, so that we look down on others as infinitely little. Nor is it eager passion alone that is arrogant; there are pride and contempt of others quite as often in the tear as in the smile. The sufferer sometimes looks, as from a very lofty height, down upon the joyful, and scorns those who are not acquainted with grief. A single passion may arrogate to itself the whole sphere of life, constitute itself the be-all and end-all of existence.

It is well for us to be aware of this; we should tremble when we find ourselves habitually taking no interest in the joys and hopes, the anxieties and dangers, the penitence and gratitude of other men. Our holiest emotions may become overweening. Even friendship, the sorrow of bereavement, that ought to open our hearts to all mankind, will, if yielded to as if they were the whole of life, harden us, make us unloving, ungracious, and arrogant. If we find ourselves growing, even through the purest feelings, deaf to the calls of duty, and unfit for human sympathies, we are forsaking the fellowship of Christ Jesus for that of the rebellious, selfish prophet Jonah. Neither scorn nor pride ever shut up Christ from human life. He trod its common ways, and smiled upon its poorest toils, and comforted its trivial as well as its deepest griefs, and shared its daily joys, and men were not little in His sight. Under the "strait" of the mightiest purpose that ever constrained a human spirit, engrossed with a passion vast as the intent of the Eternal Will, burdened by the grief and consecration of the world's sacrifice, He never scorned nor despised anything in which men were interested. He calls His people to be like Himself. The disciple whose heart is most open, whose sympathies take in most fully alike the lofty and the low, the hopeful and the despondent, the grateful and the sad, is he who is most like his Lord.

II. God's cure for absorbing passion.

Notice the exceeding gentleness with which God reproves and seeks to restore the angry prophet. He does not follow him again with terrors, as when He pursued him with shipwreck, and caused the depth

to close around him, and wrapped his head about with weeds, and barred the earth about him, and made his soul to faint within him. The disobedient are constrained by a force too strong for them; but even the ungracious doing of duty brings the spirit into fitness for gentler discipline. The Lord cares for Jonah in his self-will: "*He prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.*" And when He smites the gourd, and sends the vehement east wind and burning sun to beat on Jonah's head, it is that He may speak in words gentler than the gourd-shade, and reveal Himself to the stricken spirit as "*the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*" How different is this from man! We should have said, "Let Jonah experience to the full the barrenness and bitterness he has brought upon himself; let the life he scorns be taken from him." So we speak, repaying scorn with scorn, glad that the self-absorbed man is his own tormentor. "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.*" "*He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.*"

God seeks to restore the prophet by awakening love in his heart: awakening his interest, and making him tender over the gourd. "Love for a gourd," some may contemptuously ask: "what weak folly is this?" But, my brethren, this is the meaning of the history. "*Thou hadst pity on the gourd,*" are God's words to Jonah. In poor cottages, looking so destitute one hardly likes to

enter them, women nurse flowers, calling them "pets" and "beauties," and cherishing them as gently as though the flowers could smile on them, and repay them for their care. These women know what it is to love the plants; and many a one is bound by this tenderness to a world of men and women, which else she might regard with selfish, bitter scorn. The "*little ewe lamb*," says Nathan, the prophet, that the poor man had, "*lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.*" Over the wretched, gloomy Jonah, sprung up the wondrous plant, and its leaves and tendrils drew off his thoughts from himself, and as he watched it grow, a new interest was awakened in him. His heart softened to the plant; and the man who, a little before, despised his own life and scorned all Nineveh, becomes strangely tender and reverential over a gourd. There is something wonderful in life, even though it be the life of a common weed. Such things speak to us, however faintly we may understand them, of an awful power that forms, and an ever-watchful care that tends them: they are "*fearfully and wonderfully made.*" Around us are manifold influences to wean us from perverse melancholy, and draw us out of ourselves. Jonah loves his gourd, and "*has pity*" on it when it is smitten.

The first result of Jonah's tenderness would seem to be a deeper gloom. Another wrong is added to his suffering; and again he cries for death. "*It came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.*" But it has not been all in vain: for he is prepared to listen to the voice

that once more sounds in his ears. *“And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.”* They were bad and bitter words to speak, but better spoken than hid in his heart. There is yet one thing worse than perverse and sullen speech to God—perverse and sullen silence. No longer brooding over his woe, but uttering it to God, God answers him. He who spoke to Job out of the whirlwind answers Jonah from the withered leaves and stalks of the dying gourd.

How wonderful is what He says. The tenderness that was in Jonah, poor as it was, mingled with selfishness as it was, was yet, in its dim and partial way, an emblem of the tenderness of God for every creature He has made. *“Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a [night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”* O sweet and awful words! “Thy care and watchfulness may give thee to understand mine. Thou canst not bear to see wasted life; thou canst not bear that even a plant should perish, and its beauty and grace, on which so much skill is lavished, be no more. Thou canst not bear that what has lived, and lived for thee, should die. And shall I be careless of the great city? Shall I bear to see the men and women and little children who live, live in Me, and live for Me, and the poor dumb beasts that I have bound up in fate with man—shall I bear to see them die?” There is this sacred energy in love, however poor it may be, however

mixed with selfishness, that it admits us into the secret of God's counsel, helps us to bear Divine mysteries and understand God's ways. "*God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*"

And since, on every hand, God has put the tokens and witnesses of His Divine care and tenderness; since every blade of grass we tread on has been by Him endowed with life, and the lilies of the field are clothed, and sparrows numbered, and the fowls of the air are fed by Him, do we not hear on every hand the voice that calls us from our absorbing passions, from our griefs, our angers, and our woes? Most of all, in this great world of men, whom He loves and pities and spares, may we find the blessed influences by which He would reprove us in all our selfishness, and restore us to Himself. Up, then, "from lonely woes that wring the breast;" from "the grief that saps the mind;" from the despondency that sighs, and the rebellion that cries, for death; and out among your fellow-men and women, and little children that laugh and cry, and learn and disobey; here shall you meet with your reproving and restoring God. Here shall you be convicted of weakness and selfishness, and here shall you be healed. The great truth of God's care for all, and care for you, will be taught you here; the great truth that God is not fickle, but in infinite wisdom is doing all things well.

Life is worth having, when every human creature is felt worthy of our love: the voice of duty will sweetly beckon us to human sympathy and human helpfulness. And so the dark mystery of your life will be read. In God's care for all men, you will find yourself surrounded

by God's care for you. The wise and blessed purpose of the individual destiny is seen in the one eternal purpose of love to men.

To God our everlasting Father, and to Christ in whom the loving purpose of God is revealed, and to the Holy Ghost who makes that purpose ours, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.



VIII.

DIVINE ORDINATION OF NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL WINTER.

GENESIS viii. 22.

While the earth remaineth, . . . winter . . . shall not cease.

GOD'S covenant with men, His ordinance of heaven and earth, is that "*while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*" This is an illustration of His general method of procedure. The processes of His government are symbolized, not by the straight line, but by the wave; He accomplishes His purposes, not by the uniform progress of the same conditions, but by the constant recurrence of conditions, quite opposite in character and manifestation. Winter is as much a "*good gift and perfect gift*" as summer; for all the higher forms of life, and for the completeness of God's order of the world, winter is useful, needful. Winter's rest is as necessary as the activities of spring; to be fertile, the clod must stiffen and be pulverized by the rigid frost; and the brooks must sometimes be locked up, if they are to preserve a healthful flow.

Germens ripen during the long months of cold as well as under the sun's genial rays; all the winter through, the trees are consolidating into firm wood the tender branches and flowing sap that summer has elaborated. Consolidation is as necessary as growth; life has to harden into force, in order to new and larger activity. To men, relaxed by a sultry sun, winter comes with an invigorating, tonic power; out of winter, as out of a cold bath, they come refreshed, glowing, strengthened.

All this is as true in the spiritual, as in the natural world. Spiritual growth proceeds under the same conditions of change and temporary contrast as bodily growth. The life of the soul, the life of the church, each has its seasons; so long as this shall last on earth, "*seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*" Nor is spiritual winter a season for mourning, as though it were all evil, all due to our own faultiness. It is part of God's order in our spiritual life, and He has blessed purposes to be served by it.

This is the subject I would now bring before you. I am not simply asking you to study the benign law of the seasons; that would be a study worthy of Christian men, one which would give us matter wherein to glorify God. But I shall suggest to you some of the spiritual analogies of winter. I ask you,

I. To recognise spiritual winter as an ordination of God.

II. To look at some of its objects.

III. To see how we may improve it to our spiritual well-being.

I. Notice spiritual winter as an ordination of God.

The words "summer in the soul," "winter in the soul," carry their own suggestions; they call up images rather than stand in need of definition. Summer is distinguished by manifest fulness of life, active life, life growing and increasing, life proclaiming itself to all the senses, and rejoicing them all, putting itself forth in shapes of loveliness and rich colours, in sweet odours and pleasant sounds. "*The winter is past, and the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.*" Summer is marked by tender calm, by beauty and delight. The earth is clad with soft verdure, relieved by brilliant hues and breathing sweets. The seas are hushed to rest; the brooks, that once were swollen to hoarseness, now ripple peacefully. There are cheerful heavens and a smiling sun; zephyrs breathe, and rains are gentle; under the joyous skies there is a joyous earth; "*the pastures are clothed with flocks, the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.*" Summer brings also awakened and quicker sensibilities; feeling is in harmony with external aspect; and all living creatures receive delight from nature's wealth. Sentient life is full and peaceful; birds warble their gladness, sheep gambol and goats skip, the heavy oxen luxuriate in rich pasture. Men forget their sorrows and lay down their burdens; health is borne on summer breezes, and peace is whispered from summer skies; to breathe is to be happy, and life is bliss.

The difference between summer and winter is, how-

ever, one of feeling, not of life ; the contrast is rather that of opposite manifestations of life, than of life and death. Endurance is as much a quality of life as growth ; the power of living creatures to resist the operation of the elements is as truly a measure of their vitality as is their power of increase. Compare a tree in summer with the same tree in winter ; in contrast with its myriad leaves, its delicate blossoms and glowing fruit, the barren branches and dry twigs might seem to speak of death. Yet the tree remains firm under frosts that would turn a log to touchwood. The amount of moisture contained in a tree, if it existed in the crevices of monstrous crags, would, under the action of the freezing winter, rend cliff after cliff, and hurl their fragments thundering down. Yet the tree stands unmoved by frost ; the force of life preserves it still a tree. At the first touch of cold, innumerable insects bury themselves deep in the earth, where their vital energies maintain them, while fallen leaves and twigs are being converted into mere mould. The dormouse, the squirrel, and the bear could not slumber peacefully away the weeks of cold, but for the power of life within them ; their energy of life is seen in the maintenance of their bodily warmth and the continuance of their bodily functions, while the snow covers them and the frost crisps the surface of their lair. A change in the aspect of life is not a loss of life itself ; the God of life is present in winter as in summer. Present, and active too ; the energies of the ever-working Father not only sustain life during winter, but by winter are also preparing for renewed activities, more healthful growth, and lustier increase.

The true spiritual analogue of winter, then, is not spiritual death, not even feeble spiritual life; nor need the words "winter in the soul" suggest dismay and despondency, as though, at such a time, we were lacking the inspiring presence of the living God. It may have some of the appearance of death, to thoughtless observers it may seem to be death; but even in its winter, the regenerate differs from the unregenerate soul by a difference that is infinite, eternal.

When we speak of "summer in the soul," we think of elevated emotions and quick spiritual sensibilities. We recognise the time when we are full of liveliest zeal; when adoration is spontaneous; when prayer rises in our hearts, and praise is ever sitting on our lips; when ardent ejaculations come unbidden, and we are sensitive to every prompting of the indwelling spirit, responsive to innumerable Divine appeals. There are such times in Christian experience, when Christian activity needs no effort, and Christian affection is instinctive; when all the impulses tend to Christ, and to live is to be godly. There are times when we experience the reverse of all this: when external influences and internal impulses seem alike devoid of spiritual savour; when Christian feeling has to be cultivated with all carefulness; when the spirit has to be summoned to worship; when we have to watch, if we would pray, and to school ourselves into thankfulness. Not now is emotion unbidden, not now are our spirits sensitive; effort rather than enjoyment marks our spiritual activity; faith has to endure coldness instead of expanding under genial influences, to resist adverse powers, not simply to rejoice in conscious fulness.

It is part of God's own ordination that spiritual life should be subject to such changes, we cannot always trace them to our own heedlessness. Often, indeed, we may find the reason of such an alteration in our sins; carelessness in the Divine life will change sensibility into torpor, activity into feebleness. Love of the world chills as it steals over us; distrust will transfigure bloom to barrenness; sin always checks Divine affection, and gives us bitterness for peace. But, very often, the change comes on us unawares. Gradually we become conscious of an altered spiritual state; we are still earnest, still obedient; we preserve our fidelity to Christ, and yet our emotions lose their freedom, and spiritual life is more and more an effort. It is God's will that it should be so. Here, as in all His works, we find, not the uniform progress of the same conditions, but a succession of varying discipline. Now we are called on for effort, now permitted to enjoy; at one time feeling predominates, at another thoughtfulness, forecast; sometimes spontaneous emotion gives birth to sacred meditation; again we have to meditate that we may feel. The wise Christian knows that his spiritual life is thus varied for him: remembering how through protracted seasons of experience so different, he has grown in grace, he will see in these changes diverse manifestations of the One Spirit who is ever with him.

Moreover, it is not in individual experience alone that this law of spiritual seasons is found operative; even more remarkable are the changing conditions of Christian societies. There is often a wonderful harmony of spiritual state between a pastor and his people, and between all the members of a church. Without any conference,

they utter the same language, breathe the same feeling. Their sensibilities are awakened simultaneously, throughout a whole church there will be a deepened emotion and an increasing fervour of faith. Sermons will, week after week, be marked by unusual pathos, and the congregation will be attuned to responsive sensibility; the prayers of the people will have a fuller ardour, their worship more glowing aspiration. The disciples are all of one accord, and there comes the "*sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,*" "*cloven tongues, like as of fire,*" sit on every head; all filled together with the Holy Ghost begin to speak together the same things. And this not so much because one impresses another with his own convictions, as because the same conviction has been secretly infusing itself into all. They speak "*as the Spirit gives them utterance,*" and are prepared for each other's words, so that "*all hear in their own tongue*" the same message, and each expresses the common utterance of the Church. Further, districts of churches will be simultaneously thus aroused. A revival of religion, if real, is rarely confined to one congregation. The desires of many Christian societies are spontaneously aroused in harmony: as though they had met and planned a common operation, sought to cultivate a common state of emotion, they feel and speak and work similarly. It is not a mere sympathy of hysteric passion that passes over whole lands; the hysteric passion itself is but the caricature of a real accord of which God Himself is the author. Summer comes not to one field alone, nor to one belt of country, but to the whole of God's heritage.

So, too, does winter creep on; not over a solitary soul,

but often over a congregation, a number of congregations, the Church at large. Gradually the state of feeling is altered for them all. The pathetic and fervid utterance gives way to a calmer voice, the congregations are prepared to receive words that shall instruct rather than words that shall melt. The effort to edify and consolidate the Church will be as general as was the appeal to the emotions; the language of thoughtful wisdom will be heard in the pulpits which of late resounded with passionate exhortation and warm desire. This is not due to a general laxity, a general feebleness of spiritual life; it is the orderly change from spiritual summer to spiritual winter. Unseen, yet very really, God's Spirit is at work, altering influences, changing modes; while He introduces a new state of spiritual experiences, seeking to accomplish varied objects, and summoning to new modes of improving His presence.

II. Notice some objects of spiritual winter.

One of its purposes is to confirm and strengthen faith. It might seem as though quickened religious sensibilities and rapid success in labour were most favourable to faith. The ardour of Christian emotion makes it easy to believe in Christian truth; strong feeling prompts to a confession distinct as that of Peter, "*Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.*" When we see whole assemblies moved by the simple, impulsive preaching of the gospel, doubt seems scarcely possible. The burning zeal which breathes through impassioned exhortation, and prompts to prayer that has the assurance of its answer in the firmness with which it grasps the blessing, diffuses itself in many a heart hitherto cold, and changes distrustfulness into confidence that God is working.

Faith is, indeed, thus stimulated ; but faith must not only be stimulated, it needs also to be confirmed. The boy, who in summer sows his mustard-seed, has not long to wait, nor is his faith much tried ; in a few hours he sees the yellow seed transformed into green blades. "*The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.*" During many weeks of winter he has to wait, wrestling down his anxieties as he beholds his fields flooded or frost-bound, and marks how the sun delays his coming. He has to sustain himself by faith that "*summer and harvest shall not cease.*" Christian faith must be not only the trusting impulse of the child ; it must have the calm confidence of the man. Patience is a part of manly trust ; faith confides in the unseen operations of God, as well as traces His hand in His visible workings. A faith supported only on emotion, resting in frames and seasons, is never a strong faith ; impulse grows through patience into energy ; emotion is subdued, that faith may be confirmed ; progress is concealed, that we may more entirely confide in the unseen God. Faith is thus made to "*stand,*" not in feeling, nor in result alone, but "*in the power of God.*"

Spiritual winter acts as a check upon excesses. The life which the sun fosters is not all healthful ; corruption, too, is active under summer heats. Blighting insects, fiery scorpions, the deadly serpent, fever and malaria, are bred of warmth. Often the rapid increase of loathsome creatures is in proportion to their loathsomeness ; the world would become unbearable, but that winter comes to check their increase and destroy their power.

And do we not know what fatal excesses are sometimes the sequel of revivals? Licentiousness comes of corrupting spiritual energies; sensibility has a terrible tendency to pass into sensuality. The unchecked indulgence of even the purest impulses is not favourable to true Christian manhood; long-continued fervour of emotion enervates the soul. God, therefore, breathes forth a cooler air, subdues feeling and chastens passion, gives us to resist as well as to enjoy. The tide of genial influence ebbs, and a healthful chill is spread around us.

There are other excesses, not in themselves fatal, but dangerous, and likely, if indulged in, to interfere with general Christian progress. Sometimes, when summer lingers long, vegetable growth proceeds too far. Sprays are formed which the vital power of the tree cannot support; they would, if permitted to remain, wear out the tree, and, instead of yielding much fruit in after years, it would be disfigured by a lean and straggling excess of feeble twigs. Frost is nature's pruning-hook; the storm brings down a shower of decaying sprays. It is thus that, under strong excitement, we often plan works beyond our power to execute; and there is danger, if we carry them on, that all our energies will be expended in feeble efforts, nothing being done because too much is undertaken. Special services often interfere with the regular ministrations of the gospel; common duty is neglected while men are seeking to work new wonders. God's restraining influence is therefore felt; the decay of first enthusiasm recalls to ordinary work. Churches and Christians would often be spared severe chastisements for neglected duty, if they were prompt to recognise God's meaning in a change of spiritual feeling. The

overgrowth which resists the frost the gardener's knife must cut away. It is not by perpetuating special efforts beyond their special season, but by attending to the humbler ordinary claims that God's work is best accomplished. It is shame to Christians to let common duty, which is ever urgent, lie unfulfilled while they are busying themselves in protracted services, and undertaking labour whose only recommendation is its novelty.

There is much in the training of the Christian character and of the Christian church for which a subdued and quiet state of emotion is more favourable than a state of excitement. For instance, the formation of clear opinions as to Christian doctrine, and the revelation of God's character and will in the Bible, is important. The gospel appeals to our intelligence, as well as to our feelings. We have to serve God "*with the spirit, and with the understanding also.*" We should be able to "*give a reason for the hope that is in us.*" We are to be "*well instructed.*" We are spoken to as "*wise men,*" who can "*judge what is said.*" We are to "*prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.*" Now, I by no means believe that quickened sensibilities and fervid emotions are necessarily inconsistent with the calmest judgment, the clearest intelligence. There is a transparency in the summer as in the winter atmosphere; warm light unveils the distant hills, and spreads a wide landscape before us, just as much as cold light. In the clear winter sky the stars shine with piercing lustre; on summer nights they stoop to us with larger, mellower blaze. Still, there often is a throb and tremulousness in the heated air that interferes with vision, and the purple vapours, though beautiful, are deceptive. As a fact, it is true that strong reli-

gious excitement tends to become unfavourable to clear and complete conceptions of truth. When almost every passage of holy writ stirs the deepest feeling, and every thought is rapt, we can scarcely take a connected view of the whole revelation of God ; we cease to study while we adore. A congregation under strong excitement often finds doctrinal discourse or connected exposition of the Scripture dry, and calls it unspiritual. In order that this needful work may not be neglected, God fits us for it—He gives us winter for the study of truth.

Self-culture and church discipline find their appropriate season in the calmer time. With the stress of summer upon him the farmer is compelled for a little to neglect himself and the general business of his farm. Fruits must be garnered as they ripen ; men work even beyond their strength ; the study of the markets, the succession of crops, the balancing of accounts, are little thought of, when every day is almost too short for its necessary labour. We cannot examine ourselves when we are full of emotion. Self-culture gives way to spiritual enjoyment. A church thrilling with high-wrought sensibilities can scarcely give minute attention to its discipline. That carefulness may not be forgotten ; that each one, being proved, may have his appropriate labour and his portion in due season, God subdues emotion, sends spiritual winter.

For certain aspects of the gospel, too, a calm condition is fitter than excitement. Duty, responsibility, self-restraint ; these are true Christian words. Sobriety, circumspection, endurance, forbearance ; these also are Christian graces. God gives the opportunity for their exercise, provides the influences favourable for their cultivation.

III. How are we to improve spiritual winter? This will wholly depend on the clearness with which we recognise God's ordination in changing spiritual conditions, and the readiness with which we fall in with them.

It gives dignity to our spiritual life to see it thus progressing under various seasons and manifold change. The gourd which springs up in a night is not the highest type of vegetable growth; it also perishes in a night; while trees that endure winter as well as expand in summer, measure their age by centuries. There are insects whose life is all summer, for they only live a summer day. Those nations are the noblest which are under temperate zones, where all the seasons are most nearly balanced. Because spiritual life is so broad, its changes are so many. It affects the whole man; it is knowledge as well as feeling; it gives delight, and also calls for restraint; it is patient as well as sensitive; it endures as well as expands. All moral forces unite for its perfection; all kinds of influence are needed for its maturity.

There is a lesson of mutual Christian tolerance suggested here. Of late years, our churches have tended to part off into two divisions: those that do not believe in revivals, and those that believe in nothing else. It is easy to criticise one another, to attack each other's weak points; is there not a better way? It is neither wise nor Christian to condemn all Christian fervour that rises above the staid decorum of ordinary Church life, or to stigmatise as unhealthy every manifestation of awakened earnestness and zeal that affects multitudes instead of merely individuals. On the other hand, it is very painful to see the efforts made by some unnaturally to protract

periods of great religious excitement ; attempting to force themselves perpetually into elevated feeling, and making congregations feverish and restless by vain endeavours to recover an emotion that in its own nature is and must be transient.

That Christian, that Church will be most healthful, most useful, that is ready to respond to God's varying plan. Summer must not be spent in enjoyment, nor winter wasted in repining. The grasshopper who sang all the summer, when winter came found herself starving. "*Go to the ant, thou sluggard ; consider her ways, and be wise ; which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.*" The stimulated energies of a revival time must be preserved and carried on into colder periods. The clear vision and calm judgment which the winter of the soul is fitted to impart must be treasured up for the right improvement of the season when emotion shall be again excited, and fervour shall be renewed. Each period has its discipline, its special labours, and all unite to make strong Christians and useful men of God.

God's spiritual work is ordered according to the same laws as His natural work ; the order of the world is typical of His government of souls. All natural laws are the "patterns of things in the heavenlies." God promised that "*seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, should not cease,*" that men might be assured that He would not again destroy them. Changing spiritual seasons are an earnest that God designs spiritual life to be undying, undecaying.



IX.

THE CONFESSION OF THOMAS.

JOHN XX. 28.

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

WHEN Thomas called Jesus "*My Lord and my God*," he gave utterance to the fullest confession that had yet been made of the absolute divinity of Christ. The disciples had been slowly, but surely, advancing to this confession: it was involved in the very fact of their discipleship. The title "*My God*" is but the logical expression of the truth involved in their entire allegiance to Him; none but God can be the Lord of the human spirit. Nor will it seem strange to any who know the secret of earnest doubt, and how God guides the earnest doubter, that so frank and full a confession should first come from the lips of Thomas, and should follow so soon after the expression of his scepticism. The very sincerity which prompted the refusal to believe in the resurrection of Christ, petulant and foolish as was its utterance, led Thomas to follow out at once to their ultimate conclusion the thoughts which were awakened by his Lord's appearance to him; half-beliefs were impossible to such a man, his confession is as thorough as his unbelief. The confession itself sheds

light on both the character of his doubt and the process of his conviction.

The words of Thomas are a true confession ; they reveal the very soul of the man. Worship and self-surrender are better expressions of faith than a creed can ever be. The experience of Thomas will help us to apprehend the importance attached, in the New Testament, to the doctrine of Christ's divinity : how it is that, in the language of our Lord and His apostles, that doctrine is so solemnly fenced about and guarded ; the perception of it made the end of piety, the token of Divine illumination, and the witness of everlasting life. It will teach us the meaning of the doctrine, will guard us from looking at the divinity of Christ as a party Shibboleth or a metaphysical puzzle. It will also broaden our Christian sympathies, for it will show us that many a man is a living exemplification of the spirit of the confession, although he is unable to utter the letter of the creed.

These words of Thomas imply,

- I. Self-knowledge ;
- II. Knowledge of the meaning of life ;
- III. Knowledge of God.

I. They imply self-knowledge. When Thomas says to Jesus, "*My Lord and my God,*" he is confessing that his past life has been a mistake ; that whereas he had sought to rule himself, he has now discovered that his deepest need was One to rule him ; that whereas he had made his own will his standard, he now finds peace only in submission to another ; that whereas he had sought to bring all facts to a test he had himself appointed, he now sees truth to be independent of him,

claiming and enforcing his acceptance. The arrogance of his former speech,—“*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe*”—contrasts strikingly with the lowliness of his submission—“*My Lord;*” the restlessness and hopelessness of his week of doubt, with the peace and joy with which he yields himself to Christ’s rule and guidance. A new revelation has been given him; light has been poured into his soul, not only illustrating the fault of that rash speech and his proud implication of the credulity of his fellow-disciples, but making known to him the one great need of his soul, a Lord to sway him with absolute authority, to control his will, and form his judgment, and give law to his inmost spirit.

My brethren, our great want is a ruler; the need of submission is one of the deepest of human needs. At first sight it seems quite the reverse; self-will appears conspicuous in man’s history, self-assertion is often thought the true glory of manhood. Poets have sung the dignity of ambition; even when over-weening it is styled “a vice that leans to virtue’s side:” the love of fame, that “last infirmity of noble minds,” is often regarded as a proof of their nobility. Yet look at the restlessness of self-seekers, and listen to their ceaseless complaining. The wealthy man confesses that, with all the substance his hands have gathered, himself is poor. Let self-will be ever so successful, the heart is still unsatisfied. Ambition is soon sated; and the “head that wears the crown” is “uneasy,” not more because of the cares of government than because the monarch is tired of himself. Climb the loftiest pinnacle of Fame’s

temple, and inscribe your name there far above all others; it is still your name, the symbol of your feeble self, the witness of your restlessness, the token of your despair. Self-will, projected on the largest canvas, is but self-will after all, puny, full of weariness and torment.

Even the partial stimulus which self-seekers have, while yet they are striving for and have not secured their object, witnesses to the same truth: for their will is subjected to their purpose; they have a ruling motive; a man may choose his aim, but when he has chosen it, it controls him. Our object in life, the aim we follow, the motive that impels us—all these words indicate our need to be under control. No man ever found rest till his purpose and aim in life were decided on. Seeking an object, men for a time are tranquil, for they are freed from self; but when their object is secured, they fall again into the restlessness of bondage to a self that is insufficient for them.

Look now at another class of men, of nobler character and higher tone. The truth-seeker is freed from self, for truth is over him, and he is under the law of truth. He feels truth to be absolute, independent of him, and he yields allegiance to it. It is not the creation of his thoughts or fancies or reasonings; in that it is truth it claims to mould his judgment and sway his thinking. The lover of right is under an eternal law of rectitude; righteousness is not something that he invents; he scarcely discovers it; it reveals itself to him. Right *is*, and is his lord. Duty is what we owe, not what we choose to give; it claims the submission of our will, asserts authority to control our purposes. And with its

own incomparable majesty it decks its loyal subjects, who, not in resisting, but obeying its imperial bidding are truly exalted.

“ He that ever following her commands,
On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Thro’ the long gorge to the far light, has won
His path upward, and prevail’d,
Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun.”

Truth, duty, rectitude—these are vague words. What is truth? Its seekers are all in disagreement; they are not at one with each other, and often what a man holds for true to-day, he spurns to-morrow as an exploded error. What is right? The standard of rectitude in our England is very different from that of ancient Rome; the absolute righteousness seems to shift with man’s changing will. Has duty any higher standard than statute-law or regard for the greatest happiness of the greatest number? These very words set us again upon a drifting sea of self-will. The thoughts of nations and the decrees of majorities are no more absolute than a man’s own judgment. Truth, duty, rectitude—these are cold words. To stir passion and control affection, they must be seen embodied in personal form. Love, reverence—these are the heart’s deep wants. Cold abstractions can never deliver us from self.

Thomas had found all he needed in Christ. Christ was “*the truth* ;” Christ’s will was absolute righteousness; duty was what he owed to Christ. There was no coldness nor vagueness in these names, when they summed themselves up in the person of his Lord. Love rises to

worship in his confession; his heart is at rest when in passionate submission he says, "MY LORD."

This is the secret of Christ's power over men. He comes among them as their Lord; He claims authority and asks submission. "*He taught them as one having authority,*" and therefore, "*the common people heard him gladly.*" Christ does not go out among men, alluring them by pleasures, flattering their self-will; He speaks of toil and labour and self-denial. He simply bids them "*Follow me,*" and they leave all and follow Him. He comes into the world of spirits as He trod the earth, its King and Master, and spiritual miracles are wrought by Him like those which followed when He spoke to nature. He speaks: "*Peace, be still,*" and over distracted hearts is breathed a calm as deep as that which brooded on the Galilean lake. He speaks to those to whom self-will is poverty and barrenness, and there are fruitfulness and joy as when the loaves were multiplied before Him, and the water gladdened into wine. He speaks to those whose selfishness is weakness and disease, and in obedience to Him come health and energy. Even to souls dead in pleasure and in sin He speaks, and they awake to life, as the dead damsel when she heard the word "*Arise,*" and Lazarus when he obeyed the command, "*Come forth.*" And herein do we see the meaning of language that may sometimes seem perplexing:—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." For in meekness and lowliness, in submission and obedience, our spirits find their end and purpose. The heart knows its Lord when His voice is

heard. Not in shifting His yoke, to find self-will a restless burden, from which we run for relief to cruel taskmasters who will lade us yet more heavily and as fruitlessly, but in submitting to the true and rightful Lord, "*Him who is holy, Him who is true*"—herein is rest.

In Christ Jesus too, the Son of God and Son of Man, we see what submission really is, how blessed to yield our wills to the eternal, ever holy will of God. Christ Himself was obedient. He sought not His own will, but the will of the Father which sent Him. Nor is it contradictory to see our Lord in the form of a servant. He who came from the bosom of the Father to tell us that we are lost and ruined, because we seek our own wills and not the will of God, must Himself be submissive. He who came revealing absolute truth, absolute righteousness, claiming our homage for truth and righteousness, must Himself yield them homage. His authority is that of one who gave up His own will; Christ can rule because He knows how to obey. The Son of God is the Lord of man; but "*the Son can do nothing of himself.*" He claims us for the Father; we yield ourselves, and He presents us with Himself unto the Father. "*I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*"

II. The words of our text imply knowledge of the meaning of life. It was Christ's perfect knowledge of Thomas which brought from him the adoring confession, "*My Lord and my God.*" "*Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto*

him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." And now his words are brought back to him: "*Jesus saith to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*" Christ had heard those words; He had been with Thomas, though Thomas had not been with Him. What he had said to his fellow-disciples had fallen into Christ's ear: Christ had heard his speech and remembered it, and here He was to satisfy His servant's doubt. But Thomas could not stop here; as none to whom Christ shows Himself aware of a special perplexity, and prepared to answer a special need of the spirit, can rest in that one separate instance of His knowledge and grace. He who knew this, must know all His disciple's heart. He who had been present when Thomas unthinkingly had uttered his doubts, must have been always with him. His call, Christ's long forbearance and gentle teaching; all his past life would flash upon him, and he would recognise it all as under Christ's guidance, as Christ's plan to educate and bring him to Himself.

Christ had done infinitely more than to simply give Thomas the test for the resurrection which he himself had fixed; He had brought Thomas to a better mind, and made that test appear unnecessary and absurd. He had prepared Thomas for a far fuller recognition of Him: the touch would only have convinced him that the risen Jesus was here; Thomas, without touching Him, calls Him "*My Lord and my God.*" Underlying Thomas's

wish for a sensible proof that the Master was alive again, there had been the unquenchable longing for personal intercourse. That John had seen Christ, and Peter and the others had seen Him, was nothing to Thomas. Nothing can reveal a personal Lord to us, but that Lord's communion with ourselves; the heart yearns for personal fellowship with One so sacred and so dear. And Thomas's heart was satisfied now; doubt was overborne in the presence of Him who read His servant's spirit as an open book. The recesses of his heart were searched; to Christ's guidance he could absolutely submit himself. Such tenderness, such acquaintance with him, such forbearance from reproach, sympathy so gracious, could be none other than Divine. The repose of his heart in Christ was the revelation to him of Christ's divinity. "*And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*"

My brethren, it is such a guide we want; one who can read our heart, one who can supply our every need, who can see what of truth there is in us amid all our perplexities, and pardon all our sins. It is such a guide we preach in Jesus; not one who lived a few years in Palestine, and associated with a few disciples, and then passed away; but one who was "*before all things,*" the author and controller of them all, who "*ascended upon high, that he might fill all things;*" and is ever with His people. He knows you, for He formed you for Himself, and has been ceaselessly watching over you; your life, with all its difficulties and perplexities, is His plan for educating you for Himself and God. Every true thought in you He has inspired; your folly and distrust have not alienated Him from you. Each doubt He is waiting to

clear away ; in all your waywardness He checks you ; even your wilfulness does not drive Him from your side. Many, like Thomas, doubting if their Lord would ever come to them, feeling that nothing less than personal communion and the silencing of their own peculiar doubts would persuade them that He was indeed alive, have felt Him nigh ; and in the fulness of His presence, and in His entire acquaintance with their want and weakness, His ready pardon and assuring words, have been constrained to confess that all their fears were needless ; that when they mourned because they were not with Him, He, though unseen, had been with them : they have yielded themselves to Him that He might ever lead and direct them, and in gratitude and trust, have said, "*My Lord and my God.*"

"My Lord ! O that I could call Him mine. I have rejected His authority. I have tried to rule myself and failed. I have been the sport of every idle fancy ; captive in all kinds of degrading bondage. I cannot be my own Lord, would that I could find Him. I have cut myself off from His rule, and now like a planet that flings itself from its orbit and is left to wander desolate, destructive, through the realms of space, I am in darkness and loneliness, a lost spirit in a dreary wild. I seek my Lord, but He is not to be found ; I long to yield to Him, but I was not by when Jesus came." Is this your sad complaint ? Then is Jesus guiding you to Himself. He is near you, and your sorrow is entering into His soul. Your darkness, and dreariness, and solitude, shall bring you where you shall behold Him. And when you see Him, He will prove Himself your Lord by answering these complaints. You will see that He has never

left you ; you will find that He knew you better than you knew yourself ; that He has been preparing for you a higher joy in Him than you venture to hope for ; that through your doubt He is leading you to a purer, stronger faith ; and fully yielding yourself to Him, you will with Thomas say, "*My Lord and my God.*"

III. The words of Thomas imply knowledge of God. I say, "knowledge of God" rather than "knowledge of Christ ;" I say rather that Thomas recognised the character of God than that he perceived the dignity of Christ ; for herein lay the true value of his confession. The mere confession that Christ is a Divine person is barren ; the knowledge that God is speaking to us, feeling with us, come into actual fellowship with us in Christ, is new life to the spirit. The looking for God in dignity, in awful grandeur, in the unveiling of mysteries of pomp and power, obscures the perception of God in the perfection of moral excellence, infinite worth, the influence by which goodness sways the heart. It was to deliver men from this very error that Christ came. The disciples were ever expecting that Christ would communicate some stupendous truth concerning God ; that He would unveil the secrets of eternity, and make the uncreated Majesty appear before them. They saw that Christ knew God ; while they were waiting for the revelations He would make, they were drawn ever more and more near to Christ Himself. Gradually their conceptions of Him became exalted ; Christ's own words were fulfilled, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" The teacher concerning God was seen to be the Son of God. Here at length from Thomas breaks the full confession that this is God. The sanctity and tenderness, the

“*glory full of grace and truth,*” the power by which Christ swayed him and won his adoration—“*this was the true God and eternal life.*”

Thomas could not say “*My Lord,*” without saying also “*My God;*” for it is shocking to yield the whole heart to any other than God; to give the spirit to any rule, or surrender the life to any guidance, other than that of God. In the fact that he could not but adore Jesus, that Jesus claimed his reverence and had won his homage, it was revealed that Jesus was God. For God alone claims and commands this. “*No man*” can be “*called Master*” by an earnest soul; there is but one Lord for the spirit. The intellectual difficulty of a Trinity and an incarnation is as nothing to the moral shock, the spiritual contradiction of worshipping what is not God, finding rest for the soul, and satisfaction for the whole being, anywhere but in God.

It may be that the revelation of the Infinite involves the doctrine of the Trinity. God makes Himself known; the revelation at once is a full expression of His person, and proceeds from Him; it is one with God, and yet derives being from God: here we have the two truths of common substance and subordinate relation. The conceptions of the Logos and the Son involve the same truths; the Son is but the personal Word. But clearer and surer than such arguments is that drawn from the experience of multitudes who must render highest allegiance to Jesus. If He be not God, then are we idolaters; for idolatry is the love and service of the creature as though it were supreme; and higher love and service than Christ has won from Christian hearts is impossible. If He be not God, then have we two Gods; the one a

name, a cold abstraction, a distant Deity ; the other the Jesus who sways our spirits and subjects our hearts, to whom we render the consecration of our lives.

We may now see, my brethren, how it is that so much importance is attached in the New Testament to the divinity of Christ. The confession of Christ is not an act of the speculative intellect, it is the movement of the heart to Him, the submission of the life to Him. To worship Christ is not to pay Him compliments on the greatness of His name, the immensity of His nature, the eternity of His being, the grandeur of the throne He quitted to live and die upon the earth ; it is to feel and recognise His sway over the soul. There are Christian Unitarians who call Christ "*Lord*," though they hold back from calling Him "*God*;" the sole, and reverent, and believing homage of their heart and life is given to Him, albeit their theology does not embody the necessary consequence of this in the acknowledgment that He whom they so adore is God. There are un-Christian Trinitarians who call Christ "*God*," and yet He manifestly is not their Lord. He is not the supreme object of their love ; their judgment is not subjected to His authority ; their wills are not submissive to His rule. It is sad that the words "*My Lord and my God*" should ever be separated ; it bespeaks confusion, perplexity, and error. But confusion of the judgment is not to be compared with blindness of the heart. He is a Christian, whatever his name, whatever the articles of his creed, who owns the marvellous sway and charm of Jesus, who finds Him sufficient for the soul's need, and whose life reveals that it is under His rule.

To worship Jesus is not only to call Jesus divine, it

is to see wherein His divinity consists, to know what Divineness essentially is. This is that "knowledge of God" wherein "standeth eternal life." The knowledge of God is the foundation of piety; as is our thought of God, so will our lives be. Christ can make our lives holy and blessed; can fill them full of rest and strength, and love and gladness. Happy those whose spirits move to Him in the confession of Thomas. It is a perfectly spontaneous confession, and yet it is wholly inspired. It is the free impulse of their whole heart, but it reveals an awful, tender presence at the spring of their whole being. "*No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*" "*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*" Perfect freedom, absolute submission—the distracted human soul has here found its eternal abiding place. God manifest in the disciple's Lord—this is eternal life.



X.

CHRIST THE INTERPRETER OF HUMAN LIFE.

JOHN I. 9.

*That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.**

THE persons for whom John wrote his gospel were already familiar with the life of Christ. John wrote towards the end of the first Christian century, when multitudes had already heard from the lips of those who had "*companied*" with Jesus of Him who was born at Bethlehem and had suffered on Calvary. Fragmentary narratives were in the possession of many, drawn up from the testimony of "*eye-witnesses*," who recorded

* It has not been thought necessary for the purpose of this discourse to give another rendering of the text than that of the ordinary English Bible. Students of the Greek Testament will, however, see in the sermon the dominant influence of another rendering:—"The true Light, which lighteth every man, was coming into the world." This rendering seems most in harmony with the scope of the whole paragraph, the contrast between John and Jesus. The resolved imperfect expresses strikingly the Messianic idea.

what they had seen Him do and heard Him say. The scattered fragments had been supplemented by the gospels written "*in order*" by Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and with these gospels the churches were acquainted. Those into whose hands the gospel by John would fall knew that he was about to speak to them of the words and works, the life and death, of Jesus of Nazareth. But it is not with the name of Jesus Christ that John begins his gospel; he forbears for a little to name Him; he suspends their attention while he speaks of "*that which was from the beginning,*" of a "*Word*" by whom "*all things were made,*" of a "*Light*" that had been glimmering through all the darkness of previous history.

Some very important truths are thus impressively set forth by John. He teaches us the pre-existence of Jesus. "*The Word,*" which was "*in the beginning with God,*" "*became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.*" He teaches the true divinity of Christ. As firmly and as intelligently as we say that Jesus Christ was man, so firmly and so intelligently does John say "*The Word was God.*" The perfect revelation of the Father's character and will in Christ is involved in John's language. The glory and distinction of Jewish history was the constant manifestation in it of the present God. The Jewish faith was not an aspiration of the religious consciousness of a specially spiritual people; prophets, and psalmists, and saints were not climbing up to God through laws of nature, dictates of morality, and the lessons of social order. God was Himself with them, speaking with them, communicating to them His will. "*The Word*

of God" was a symbol of the inspiring, commanding, creating, life-giving presence of God in their midst. The active revealing God dwelt among them, and they occasionally heard His voice. And now occasional and partial revelations of Him had passed into His full and perfect manifestation. Life alone can reveal a living person: "*the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.*" The doctrine is precisely the same as that of Hebrews i. 1, 2: "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by a Son.*"

The divineness of human life, the Divine sonship of man,—this again is part of John's teaching. "*All things were made by him; and without him*"—apart from Him, independently of constant, fullest reference to Him—"*was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*" The Incarnation is the embodiment, the gathering into one human life, of the deep principles and real movements of humanity; it is the setting forth and interpretation of the common facts of the world's history, which apart from Christ are confusing and unintelligible. He is "*the true Light which lighteth every man;*" your life and mine, my brethren, the life of the sinner and of the saint, each is understood, and only understood, as we receive Christ. In Him we see what manhood really is; in Him we learn what God has intended, fashioned, and constituted us to be.

John has anticipated the objection that might be drawn from the world's ignorance of this, the world's opposition

to Christ. "*The light shineth in darkness,*" although "*the darkness comprehended it not.*" "*He was in the world, and the world was made by him,*" although "*the world knew him not.*" That the world might know Him, and in this knowledge might know itself, find its history a consistent one, He "*came into the world.*" Some reject Him, but others receive Him, and their forfeited sonship, their missed destiny is restored. "*As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*"

Christ the interpreter of human life—this is the subject I purpose to illustrate by our text.

I. Christ the interpreter of human life—how far is this true? Is it not rather sin which explains to us alike the world's history and the life of the individual man? Pride and passion, ignorance and self-conceit, indifference to God, distrust of Him, alienation from Him—are not these the facts that everywhere meet us? Wars and rumours of wars, the lusts that rage in ambition and bloodshed, and conquest and tyranny—in these national history may be summed up. Personal history is largely one of restlessness, agitation, and sin.

My brethren, we need no revelation from heaven to tell us of sin; we see a widespread ungodliness, and we are daily feeling its curse. But does this explain all? Are there not stirrings of the awakened conscience, longings of the soul for its lost innocence and peace, better hopes, holier resolves? Are there not times of penitence, calmer and sweeter days, earnest efforts to lay hold on God, and find strength and security in Him? **Has** not every nation had its periods of reformation? **have** there not been faithful counsellors, true prophets,

calling upon all peoples to repent and seek after God? Whence have these come? Are these, too, the workings of the evil soul? Does not the very depth of such movements, which the worst men and peoples have experienced, tell of another and a better spirit than the spirit of evil in man? All human history is not of unchecked sinfulness; "*the light shineth in darkness,*" and though the darkness comprehends it not, it cannot quench the glimmer. The Word has spoken, and the conscience, although dull, has been awakened and has heard.

Does sin interpret human life? or rather, is not sin felt to be its confusion and bewilderment? The life of the transgressor becomes darker and darker: it does not grow more consistent, more intelligible, as his conscience slumbers, and better hopes die out, and holier resolves are forgotten. The man lives the life of a baffled being; he loses himself amidst his own confusions: a lost soul is a soul bewildered, perplexed, undone. Look at a sinner's life and death, and tell me if it is intelligible to you. Had the soul been saved, had all its power and promise been fulfilled, had each true purpose been accomplished, had every bright hope ripened, had God's pleadings been responded to and the blessing been secured that came so near, then all would have been clear. "*The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*" But sin has obscured it all; it was sin that caused the power and promise to be wasted, sin that changed the blessing into a curse, sin that quenched the light in darkness. A saved soul—that is consistent; a lost soul—there is bewilderment in the very thought. Sin the interpreter of human life? It is sin that makes all our

confusion. Think of man made in the image of God, a world created and sustained by God: see what the history of that world is to-day; look at the marred and wasted human being; is it not sin that baffles us as we gaze? Had men grown up into the perfection of the sons of God, and the world been pure and peaceful, that would have been a harmonious story. It is sin that has made all mysterious; sin is itself the confusion that confuses all.

We cannot understand our own being till Christ gives us light; then our darkness passes, and the true light shineth. That which alone sheds light on human history is the Word of God in the world, seeking ever to drive away the darkness. "*The true light lighteth every man;*" we see God's purpose, not in the fallen, sinful world, but in the world redeemed by Jesus Christ.

II. It is not only true that salvation in Christ is the end which alone makes human life intelligible; it is also true that the law of life in Jesus Christ is the law according to which we were made; the self-devoted Saviour is "*the light which lighteth every man.*" There is a strange perversity in men which leads them to resolve every motive into selfishness. Men are always seeking, it is said, to please themselves, and this in their noblest and purest, as well as in their common, doings. We see ourselves in our families; therefore do parents give themselves up for their children, and brothers and sisters live for one another. We see our families in our country, and patriotism is but self-gratification after all. We see the image of our country projected on the world, and all philanthropy is but the final enlargement of self-love.

So men speak, and so they reason; but they only

confuse themselves thereby. There is an impulse of self-denial which cannot thus be explained away. The father labouring for his little ones, the mother watching over her sick child's couch, do this for love's sake, and not to please themselves. The patriot denies himself for his country's good; we are often ashamed of our comforts when we reflect on the wants of others. Any one who tries to bring all actions down to the level of deeds done for self's sake, will find not only in the patriot's death and the universal response it meets with in the song of the poet and the gratitude of a whole nation, but also in the unnoticed story of the humblest families, where sacrifices are daily made, and hardships endured, and trials undertaken for one another, things which he cannot square with his theory. Selfishness there is enough in the great world of nations and the little family life; selfishness pollutes too many of our motives, but we are not given over to this. In hours of indolence, in the midst of comforts, in pains already heavy, a Word heard in the depths of the soul summonses men to forego their pleasures and to add to their pains, that they may bless and comfort others. "*The world was made by him,*" and "*he was in the world,*" though "*the world knew him not.*"

The impossibility of living a life wholly selfish, the inspirations of pity, the passion for self-devotedness, which reach their highest in the Christian life, but are not confined to Christians—all these find their explanation in Jesus Christ. In Him we see that the self-devoted life is the only true and blessed life for man. As Christ was, it would be well for us all to be. His life is no strange thing to us; it is exalted but not unnatural;

it appeals to us with all the energy of a brother's life; in Him we recognise what God would have us all be. And as we see this in Him, we understand how it is that the light of a holy generosity has been able to exist, unquenched by all the selfishness of the world. The light shone in darkness, though the darkness comprehended it not; the Word was heard in every conscience, and the spirit stirred, quickened to strange impulses, urged to deeds of love. All falls into harmony now; this is "*the true light.*" Selfishness is dark, perplexing; it is the rejection of God's law for us, and the choice of a perverted heart. God would have us full of zeal and love; He has been ever stirring men up to zeal and love, who came at length into the world.

III. If we turn from the quenchless impulse of devotedness to the quenchless impulse of worship; if we ask how it was that amidst the degradations of heathenism and the corruption of the Jews, faith itself did not die out; if we ask how it was that though philosophers often seemed on the verge of proclaiming that all religion was only a fiction useful for civil government, men could not rid themselves of reverence; if we ask how it was that in even the worst superstitions of idolatry something may yet be often seen which strangely suggests to us the gospel revelation; again we are reminded that Christ, "*the true light which lighteth every man,*" was in the world. He would not let them sink into utter godlessness; whispers in the spirit of the most daring checked them; though men "*changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beasts and creeping things,*" He was ever uttering his deep truth

in their hearts ; He preserved in them some little longing for the true, awoke in them dissatisfaction with all their vain imaginations, and sought to cherish in them a better hope. Amidst all the darkness of the old world, the expectation of One who was to come was yet taking clearer form, holding men with a firmer grip. The promise of Messiah grew brighter and more distinct in the utterances of prophets and the hearts of the faithful, all the while that Israel and Judah were rivalling each other in their backslidings. The Jewish hope at length attracted the notice of the heathen world. "There prevailed," says the well-known quotation from Suetonius, "throughout the East a firm and long established opinion, that at this time Judea was destined to rise to dominion of the world." This hope of a dawn spreading and prevailing as darkness was gathering over the nations ; this unconquerable expectation of a Redeemer in Israel, what was it but the utterance of the Word, the flashes through the gloom of Him who was the light of men ? The hope could not die out, for He was keeping it alive ; He was quickening and giving form to the expectation that "*the true light, which lighteth every man, was coming into the world.*"

IV. From the cross, which seems at first to stand apart, a solitary fact in human history, comes the light which interprets the deepest and most mysterious facts in human life. We gaze upon it at first in adoration simply, His death is only an object of our faith. As we meditate, we feel ourselves called into His fellowship ; the Cross is seen to be the sublimest manifestation, God's own vindication, of a universal law. The selfishness of pride is crushed as we recognise ourselves saved

“not by works of righteousness which we have done ;” saved simply and solely in virtue of Him who bore our curse, and by whose stripes we are healed. The very root of selfishness is crushed, as we see in this the wondrous interpretation of all life. Our sins crucifying Christ, the one man’s obedience making the many righteous ; what light is here shed backwards as far as to Adam, shed on the whole constitution of the world as well as on that Christian life to which we are called ? We have sometimes murmured that we should bear a doom for Adam’s sin ; Christ bore the doom for Adam and for us. We have murmured at the law, by the operation of which we are born into a state of sinfulness and suffering and struggle ; and have asked, “ How is that consistent with the goodness of God ? ” How it is consistent, we perhaps may not even now see ; God does not answer every “ How ” that we may choose to ask. That it is consistent God solemnly affirms in the Cross which is the symbol of clearest holiness and deepest love, for Christ came into our world, and suffered and struggled in it, and died because of its sin. Life is confused and dark whenever we think that it would be well for a man to live for himself and to himself. Christ, who lived and died for us, who freely took all our curse and gave us all His blessedness ; Christ sends us musing on all human history to find its interpretation here. They are hard words which speak of “ *the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children,* ” we rebel against the pressure of the awful fact. We come from the Cross to find this solemn fact a most blessed one ; in virtue of this constitution of the world, Christ’s blood blots out our sins, and Christ’s obedience is our righteousness.

Christ is "*the true light, which lighteth every man*:" there are things in your life and mine, inherited evils, inherited blessings, all which point to Christ as the revealer of human life, point to Christ as to Him by whom all things were made and apart from whom, without reference to whom, was not anything made which was made. There are things in human life, a community of sin and of sorrow, which are dark until we see how blessedly they appear in Christ and His gospel. Resenting the shame and struggle, we call it all a confused story, a dark riddle. Accepting the bliss and the salvation, we find life's riddle read. The meaning of it is seen in that we were made by Christ, that He who cannot but take part in the children's woe, made us to be like Himself. Our Christian life is interpreted here; the call to self-denial, to the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. We shall find that fellowship in bearing the sorrow and shame of others, and in thus witnessing for our Saviour. Love is the key to all: it is love which must suffer when others transgress; it is love by which the sinful are restored. Man was made according to the law of love; we soon feel the suffering, we are long blind to the gracious ordination of it. "*That was the true light which lighteth every man.*" Here we learn that we should be cut off from the love of Christ if we were not partakers of His sufferings. The confusion of suffering passes in the clear full light of love.

My brethren, it is a blessed thing to find Christ thus interpreting for us all human life; to learn that it is sin alone which confuses us, and to discover all clear in Jesus; to know that it was He who would not let men lie in darkness, but was ever sending flashes across their

gloom; that it was He who preserved the world from utter selfishness; that the Author of all generosity, the source of all love, has been from the beginning impelling men to generosity, kindling love in them. It is very blessed to discover that the community of woe was but anticipation of the common redemption; that the very constitution of society that made men suffer together, with and for each other, was a preparation for Him by whom all our sorrows are borne, and all whose blessedness has come on us. It fits us for hearing the words of the angel to the shepherds,* "*Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord,*" and for joining in the song of the heavenly host, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" It shows us the babe born in Bethlehem as indeed the King of men. To Him we trace all that is bright and noble in human history, the stately simplicity of the Roman and the open sympathy of the Greek, as well as the religious inspiration of the sons of Israel; in Him we see the source of the patriot's devotion and the mother's love. All that is good in the lowliest lives; the homeliest patience, unnoticed sacrifices, whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is tender, our hopes, our affections, and our triumphs gather round and ascribe their power and glory to the cross. "*On his head are many crowns.*"

" In the cross of Christ I glory;
 Towering o'er the wrecks of time,
 All the light of sacred story
 Gathers round its head sublime."

* This sermon was preached as one of a course of Advent Sermons in 1865.

It shews us what is the meaning of the life of each one of us. If we are restless amid our pleasures, if we are startled again and again out of dreams of indolence and self-gratification ; if we cannot be happy in our work ; if we are uneasy in our homes ; if we are sick at heart, with vague yearnings for we know not what that shall be better than our daily life ; it is because the Word is within us, the Spirit of Christ is pleading with us to receive Him. If we have not been allowed to sink amidst temptations ; if we have not been suffered to rest in a life of ungodliness ; if there be in us any better thoughts, any purer feelings, any holier aspirations ; these seek their fulfilment in Christ. I beseech you, my brethren, bear with me while yet a little longer I speak of Him who has come into the world. He only is your light, you dwell in darkness without Him. He only is your peace, you cannot rest except in Him. He is seeking you ; He is nearer you than you may ever yet have deemed. He is your salvation, the lost man is found as he gives himself to Christ.

Believe in Jesus, submit yourself to Jesus, follow Jesus in obedience and fellowship of His Spirit, so shall you find that for which God has all your life long been striving with you ; that for which He created you and sent you into the world ; that for which He placed you on your mother's bosom, and nourished you in the home of your childhood and brought you here to-day. You were made by Christ and for Christ, and you never will know what your life means till you give yourself to Christ.



XI.

THE WIDOW'S SON OF NAIN.

LUKE vii. 11—15.

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

THIS miracle has much in common with Christ's other two miracles of raising from the dead. The same calm authority, the same Divine self-confidence is evident in them all. He calls upon the dead with the assurance that they will obey His voice. He speaks to them as though they were yet on earth, addressing them by name: "*Young man, I say unto thee, Arise,*" "*Maid, Arise,*" "*Lazarus, come forth.*" Christ has none of our feeling of separation from those who have left this life. To us, in our ignorance of death,

what a strangeness and an awe hang around the grave ! The little girl who went out from our homes is no longer to us the little girl she was ; she is a disembodied spirit immeasurably beyond us by having solved the solemn mystery of death. Brother, and son, and friend, the dead seem scarcely such to us ; the claims and communion of affection are hushed in the awe of death. To Christ the dead are all they ever were. He is Lord of the dead as of the living.

Christ's life-giving word, again, is in all these miracles a word of command. He calls the dead as though they were alive, and in hearing and obeying His voice they live. He is thus suggesting an answer to that perplexity which troubles many in their theology:—What is the use of bidding the spiritually dead to any act involving spiritual life? what mean the commands of the gospel to those who are powerless to obey? Christ's life-giving word is ever a word of command; power comes in the effort to obey. Not apart from, but by means of the obedience to which He summonses, is spiritual life given. "*He speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast.*"

This miracle, however, stands alone among Christ's miracles in its perfect and absolute simplicity. It was wrought from an impulse of pure pity. No appeal was made to Christ to raise the young man; He was neither asked to do it by the bereaved mother, nor by any of those who stood by: His own compassion moved him. Many of Christ's miracles are instructive, because they stand associated with the faith of those who ask His help. He admires the faith of the centurion and of the Syro-phenician woman, and gives unto them as they will; He

tries the faith of others while He succours them. There is no trial of this poor woman, no proving of her; "*weep not,*" He says, and then He touches the bier, and bids the young man arise. And once more, Christ points a spiritual lesson in many a miracle He works. He couples sin, for instance, with disease, and speaks of healing as a pledge of forgiveness. This is not done here; He simply raises the young man from the dead, and then gives him to his mother. This is a deed of pure impulse; the simple motive of compassion appears alone in this narrative. I think this very simplicity is the special lesson of the miracle; it shews us Christ in an aspect in which we much need to see Him; it gives us a new ground for our trust and love of Jesus; it will furnish us with new reasons for our adoration of the divinely human Saviour.

I. Notice Christ's impulse of compassion. We are not satisfied with our knowledge of any man until we have seen something of his impulses. He may have a very noble purpose in his life, and be true to it with a rare fidelity; but we are not at ease with him, our affection and trust are not full, until we have seen how he acts when no constraint is upon him. Some of the saintliest lives fail to wholly win us, because there is a want of naturalness in them; everything seems done to order. Flashes of feeling, the words and deeds of an unguarded hour, these reveal a person; and nothing is more welcome than to find that a friend is consistent in purpose and in impulse. We are at rest when we see that his character is all-harmonious. For purpose is of the intellect and the will, but impulses shew the heart; the intent of a man's life shews what he is striving to

be, his impulses declare what he actually is. Now, the four gospels give us many a revelation of Christ's impulses. He did not always live as one conscious that "*the eyes of all were fastened on him*;" He did not act with a view to the impression He was going to make on others. And there is a marvellous, a touching consistency in His whole life. His purpose and His spontaneous feeling were always at one. He was as merciful as He taught us to be; as holy as He said men should seek to be; as zealous and self-devoted as He came into the world to be. His was a life that fulfilled His own ideal; His heart was exactly the same, as divine, as gracious, as single as His mission.

See how this illustrates the greatness of Christ. When men have accepted a sublime or solemn purpose in life, how distracted is their air, how self-engrossed, how oblivious of the cares, anxieties and sorrows of others it makes them. Men devoted to a noble cause often have to claim exemption from homelier duties; they are too involved, too much bent on this to be able to mark every call upon their sympathies; the mute appeal of sorrow, the silent pleadings of distress, pass by without attracting the attention of him who is burdened by his high intent. And, my brethren, we have to allow this claim. Although indifference to domestic affections, or the considerate charities of human life, is a mark of imperfection in the most devoted man, we are compelled to be tolerant of it, as of so many human imperfections. Our hearts are not large enough for every demand life makes upon us; we are not only burdened, we are often overburdened, by our mission. In the light of these facts, read again this simple narrative in Luke's gospel.

Christ had begun His missionary journeys ; the end was before Him ; His final rejection and His death ; the purpose was firm within Him of enduring all, fulfilling His Father's will, and laying down His life for the world. On entering any new city, what thoughts must have risen up in His heart ; each new morning was bringing Him on to the close of all. And yet how sensitive was He to this poor widow's sorrow ? How simply did He compassionate her, and raise her son ? *"When he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow : and much people of the city was with her."* Men burdened with a solemn purpose avoid a crowd of which they are not the centre, turn away from excitements that are apart from the object to which their lives are dedicated. Men burdened with a solemn purpose shrink from strong and painful emotions ; the demand for sympathy is too much for their over-weighted hearts. But *"when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier : and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother."* I say, the calmness, the perfect simplicity of this narrative illustrates the greatness of Christ. His air was not distraught ; He was not self-engrossed. His sympathies were as prompt, His considerateness as full, as tender, as though not a care was on His spirit.

Remember, too, how Christ subordinated family affection to the call of the gospel. He bade His disciples forsake father and mother, sister and brother, wife and

children for His sake. He told them—“*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*” He said that the result of His coming would be to divide households ; “*to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother.*” He did not shrink from demanding such sacrifices when they were required. When He called to follow Him a man whose weak affections would have been a snare to him, He forbade him to go home to bury his father. “*Follow me ; and let the dead bury their dead.*” Remember how He separated Himself from His own family. At this very time He was an alien from His mother’s house because His work and purpose required it.

Many a man has made the sacrifice that Christ demands, and risen above the claims of family affection for truth and right, for the gospel and the service of God. But commonly we become indifferent to affections we have brought ourselves to resign. The family bond is no longer an object of reverence to him who has had to cut himself loose from the family: men are almost impatient at the sight of those tendernesses that they have sacrificed to higher ends. It can scarcely be otherwise than that we should lose the sympathies in the midst of which we are not ourselves living. Imperfect men not only give up the family for Christ, they treat the impulse of family affection as a weakness. How hard and irresponsive, how cold and unsympathetic, are men who have sacrificed affection to obedience ! Yet in Christ we see an impulse of compassion for a family grief as deep and ready as though He were surrounded with all the tenderness of a beloved home. He was not

insensible to this mother's sorrows because He had orphaned Himself for His work's sake. He did not think lightly of her grief because His own renunciation was so complete. "*The only son of his mother, and she was a widow;*" all the sympathy of Christ's heart went out in compassion on her. It is not only the sensitiveness of Christ to her sorrow we have before us; that very sensitiveness reveals His own sacrifice in ceasing from those tendernesses a son delights to offer to his mother.

The perfect humanity of Christ, true to our every want, true to the best and deepest human feeling; this is illustrated in the narrative before us. But Christ is also the revelation of God, and this, His perfect humanity, gives us a view of God we sorely need. Impulsive compassion, personal tenderness, a ready sympathy with every sorrow, every weakness, every trouble, is just that which nature does not show us in God; of which our own thoughts about Him do not assure us; although we long for it, seek for it with a solemn pitiful craving. "*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.*" "*O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.*" "*He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.*" But this great and good God, is not He one to whom we must climb up? Does He in compassion and tender personal sympathy come down to us? Is He moved by our sorrows, "*touched with a feeling of our infirmities?*" Nature reveals one whom the strong may adore; a God for the happy. If our hearts are thoroughly peaceful, our minds well regulated, and our

intellectual vision clear, we can perceive His goodness, His wisdom, and His greatness. But for the weak, the unhappy, for souls in trouble and eyes dim with tears, for hearts crushed by disaster and spirits frail, confused by anguish ; what has nature to give of consolation or of sympathy ? It tells of mighty and beneficent laws, an order working good on the whole ; it tells of time and chance happening alike to all, of a fair measure of good distributed for each to share in as he may. It tells us that if we will control our personal feelings, if we will raise ourselves out of the dust and darkness of our desolation, all will not seem to be lost. It gives us a hope—a hope that mocks the weary, and that the loving will resent as an insult to the heart,—that if we will only forget our past, and bid a final farewell to departed friends, we may share again in the common goodness that gives a sparrow's supply for a sparrow's need, and in the same way furnishes the requirements of a man's mortal life. It tells us that when time has dulled our griefs, and if only we can recover the heart and mind to trace order and benignity in God's works, we shall find again the God of natural theology—the great, the wise, the good. And our hearts are crying out for pity ; this unmoved benignity is not what we want. Is there nothing in heaven like the warm personal impulses, the movings of tenderness, that make our friends come in to see us, and mingle the tears of their compassion with the tears of our distress ? We want to know if we seem exactly the same to God now in our weakness and misery as if no disaster had befallen us ? Is God exactly the same to us ? has He no other feeling toward us now than if nothing had gone wrong with us in life and heart ? We

see His gracious general purpose toward all the works of His hands ; does not God wish to comfort me, the sufferer ? Is God not moved because I am brought so low ? Is there not an impulse in Him for my tears ? Is there no pity for me so weak, I know, murmuring, perhaps, and all unworthy, yet so sorrowful ? And this narrative supplies the answer : “ *When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.* ” The impulses of Christ, the compassion moving towards each one according to each one’s need ; the truly human words, human because they were exactly what every heart wanted ; the gentle, unobtrusive sympathy that came as a cordial to the worn and sorrowing soul ; the tenderness so readily touched and so promptly responsive ; all this Christ brought with Him from heaven, all this is in God.

This simple narrative comes home to us all very nearly. Many such a crowd as that going out from Nain have we seen, in some such we have been mourners. Have we never at such a time met Christ, and felt His impulses of compassion, and heard Him say, “ Weep not ? ” We have found some comfort in recognising that life and death obey the laws of God, and fall out according to His ordination. We say to Him, with a voice in which faith struggles with grief, “ Thou madest death ; Thou, Lord, doest all things well. ‘ *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.* ’ ” And our highest consolation has been that He felt for us while we spake ; that He was moved with compassion for the grief, and helped the faith that struggled to talk with Him : for in the impulse of Christ’s compassion we have read that our God is very pitiful ;

that His tender eye is upon us, and His ear open to our pleading.

The beauty and the joy of Christ's miracles is that they do not need to be repeated. Their highest value is that they shew us the heart of Jesus; such deeds as this are no longer wrought, but He is "*the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*" Once he raised a widow's son; His impulse of compassion is still the same, so tenderly does He sympathise with each bereaved one. We, too, hear the words, "*weep not,*" although the words, "*Young man, I say unto thee, Arise,*" do not follow. There are heavenly comforts for the sorrowful flowing from that Divine compassion; we know the tender considerateness of God, for we have beheld Him in Jesus Christ. Notice,

II. The simplicity of Christ's compassion. This miracle was wrought out of pure tenderness; to comfort the widow was the sole object Christ had in view. He wrought the miracle unsolicited; He made no appeal to the woman's faith; He neither questioned her, "*believest thou that I am able to do this?*" nor exhorted her, "*only believe, all things are possible to her that believeth.*"

Among so many miracles of Christ, illustrating the power and discipline of faith, confirming our trust that no request can be made to Him in vain, there is room for a miracle like this; we have need of such a one as this, if indeed we are to see in Him a Saviour able and ready to help in "*every time of need.*" Have you never known a time, my brethren, when you could not pray? when you were so oppressed and overwhelmed by disaster that the very words "belief" and "unbelief" sounded strange, unreal, like the language of another sphere to

you? when you were conscious neither of faith nor of distrust, but only of heavy, engrossing sorrow? Have you never gone to visit a friend, and found it impossible to speak any other words than those of comfort? when it would have been altogether out of place to try to point a lesson in the affliction, because the sorrow was so great? For simple unmingled grief, simple unmingled comfort is the only balm. The perfect humanity of Jesus, true to all modes of human experience and to every human need, is seen that, in presence of a grief like this poor widow's, He comforted her at once, and then passed on.

Who like Christ has spoken of the power of prayer? Where do we find such freedom and confidence in prayer as in the life of Jesus? But it would be a sad thing if our prayers were the measure of God's regard for us; if we only received the things for which we asked. We are then in sorest need when crushed, chilled to the heart, utterly broken down, we are too prostrate to pray; that sore need moves Heaven to pity. Men of piety, earnest, well-intentioned men, but men of little tenderness, little sympathy with the varieties of soul sickness, are often scandalized at such tokens of overwhelming grief. Christ saw it with pure compassion; her's was no common suffering. "*The only son of his mother, and she was a widow;*" what manifold suggestions of desolateness are in these words! Christ was not shocked; Christ did not wonder that she should be utterly cast down. He did not obtrude Himself upon her; "*He said unto her, Weep not,*" and gave her son to her for her comforter.

There is another lesson in the calm simplicity with which Christ wrought this miracle. It is in striking contrast with His anxiety and sternness manifested in

the raising of Jairus' daughter, and His trouble at the grave of Lazarus. There he met with positive unbelief; here he has only to deal with sorrow. Grief moves the Saviour, but it does not trouble Him; unbelief distresses and distracts Him. He puts the scoffing crowd out of the chamber of Jairus' little daughter; He can do no mighty works in the presence of unbelief. Martha and Mary distrust Him; they hint the charge they do not utter, "*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*" Utter hopeless sorrow is one thing in a person who, like this widow of Nain, seems not to have hitherto known anything of Christ; it is a very different thing in Mary and Martha, who have been in constant familiar intercourse with Jesus, and should have known that no grief was hopeless to His followers. Christ has to reprove, to exhort the sisters whose great distress shows waning trust in Him. This is the reason of the distress of Christ at the grave in Bethany; He "*groans*" and "*weeps,*" and is "*troubled*" in spirit that bereavement has such power to conquer faith. The contrast between these miracles of resurrection is very instructive. It shows us the higher courage which Christ expects of those who have known Him; it is an offence, it is faithlessness in them to sorrow as others who have no hope. And it tells us too that it is not men's sorrows, but their unbelief, which is a burden to Christ's heart. Sorrow—it vanishes at His word; suffering—He can dispel it in an instant. With want of faith He has to struggle; that was the real reason of Christ's tearfulness, the strait and anguish and conflict of His life. My brethren, it is not our grief that makes our spirit desolate, and seems to cut us off from heaven's help, it

is our distrust. When the world's unbelief is overcome, when its sinfulness is purged, at Christ's command, sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Our pain and suffering are not of themselves a moment's anxiety in heaven; they move Divine compassion, but they are no source of trouble, for God can charm them at once away. Let but the sinfulness, the distrust be conquered, and the world's griefs shall pass away as simply and quietly as this poor widow's sorrow. "*God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*"

Once more; Christ gives the son to his mother and passes on, with not a word to fix attention on Himself, to point the moral of the incident, or draw a spiritual lesson from it. What perfect humanity, I say again, is here? how true to deep human feeling is this? The mother and the son would be all in all to one another then; the presence of another, even of the restorer, would have been hardly welcome; words from another's lips would have been an intrusion on the communion of their love. Remember the purpose of Christ's life; spiritual death and spiritual resurrection, spiritual disease and spiritual healing were the deep realities ever before Him. And yet His heart was large enough for all common human feelings. He shows a delicate consideration for simple human affections, deeper than all courtesy. His regard for what we call the minor emotions and necessities of human life was as gentle, as gracious, as though He lived for society alone.

How much this miracle contrasts with many a maxim, many a practice now widely current among Christian people! A simple regard for common wants and common charities is distrusted, unless every "occasion" is "im-

proved," as the saying is, for reading some spiritual lesson. And so we have our set phrases, our little pious utterances, often utterly formal, and quite inappropriate to the place and time and circumstances. My brethren, I would not say a single word about these popular ways of doing a so-called Christian work among men, if I did not think there was a more excellent way. The common worldly judgment that exalts philanthropy above Christian endeavour, and charges Christian people with carelessness about men's bodily wants and family affections, in overweening regard for their soul's welfare, is utterly false and contemptible. But how is it that earnest, tender-hearted Christian men and women are not sometimes content to do a good work? how is it that they feel bound to add a formal or an inappropriate spiritual lesson, the coldness and unreality of which contrast, often strikingly, with the warmth and devotedness of their good deeds?

No one who reads Christ's life will think Him indifferent to men's spiritual needs. It was to save their souls He came to earth and lived and laboured; and yet He was often quite content to do a deed of comfort or of kindness, and pass on with no word of spiritual application, leaving the deed itself to point its own lesson.

I believe the real reason to lie here: Christ could afford often to dispense with speech, because His life was unmistakably a witness for God. He lived for men's salvation, it was the meaning and testimony of His whole being; and hence He was not always talking of it. We cannot afford to dispense with our talk; for, alas! if we did not say it, men would sometimes not know that we were Christians at all. Formal pietism,

those little current phrases heard on all occasions, are brought in to eke out the poor, unworthy, partial witness of the life to our desire for men's salvation. When the poor widow and her son had leisure from their first joy to think how they had been restored to one another, when they learned who it was who had restored them, what would they hear? There would be no lack of spiritual lessons to them when they began to ask about Jesus. The higher significance of this miracle would appear all the more impressively because their own hearts revealed it to them.

Simplicity is the great want of modern Christian life. It is earnest, but it is somewhat forced; it follows many a good plan and way, but these are too often formal. If it were deeper, it would be less fussy; if it ruled us absolutely in heart and character, in impulse and in life, it might perhaps be less demonstrative, it would also be more effective. Christian speech is not the only Christian power. It is a true power; it is a spiritual, a Divine power. But mightiest, most effective of all, is a deep, full Christian life, earnest in devotedness to God and man. We should be happier, more natural, less constrained in doing kind and pleasant and gracious deeds, if we had ever abiding in us the spirit and purpose of Christ. Formality would give place to heartiness; the life that is an adorning of "*the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things,*" will abound in truly human impulses and deeds devoid of self-consciousness, like this simple Divine act of Jesus at the gates of Nain.



XII.

THE FATHER'S LOVE OF JESUS.

JOHN x. 17, 18.

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

THESE words command our very reverent, very earnest study. They are not such words as we could have uttered; we should shrink from even asking the question, 'why especially does the eternal, blessed Father love the eternal, blessed Son?' The sanctity of Divine affection, no less than the unsearchableness of the Divine Being, checks speculation on a theme like this. But we may not refuse to ponder the words now they have been uttered. Christ is here intending to reveal the Father and the Son to us; and it is as truly irreverence to turn away from what He makes known as to intrude into those things which we have not seen. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." In

words like these, Christ is admitting us into His dearest friendship, which it would be impious to refuse. "*Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*"

Two things we may do with such a text as this : we may endeavour simply to apprehend what Christ is saying ; we may also ask what practical bearing His words ought to have upon us, how they should influence our motives, control our judgment, affect our character. More than this we must not do ; speculation must draw back, fancy must refrain from following out suggestions as to what may possibly be involved in Christ's language. But the language itself is simple and practical. My object this morning is to keep close by Christ's very words ; it is to expound His language rather than to develop a theme.

I. Observe what Christ says of laying down His life : "*I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*" We do not err in regarding these words as an indication of Christ's consciousness of divinity. No mere man could ever have employed this language. Power over life is the prerogative of God alone. Life is His gift, our life is ever in His hands ; to none but to the Son has He "*given to have life in himself.*" Power to "*take life again*" is manifestly not ours. The awe which comes over us at the prospect of death, our attitude of simple waiting till God shall restore the life He calls to Himself, render impossible to any of us the claim to have power to take our life again. He alone gives us the resurrection who gave us first our being.

But we are wrong if we separate Christ's claim of power over His life from His obedience to the command of His Father, as though the two things were contrasted by Him. Christ knows no power except power to do the Father's will. What the Father commands is ever what the Son chooses; this inseparable unity is involved in the name "*Son of God.*"

This is not a mere doctrine of metaphysical theology; much of our metaphysics, indeed, is here silenced. Philosophers have wrangled about the liberty of creature-will; can that be called power to do a thing which does not involve power to do its opposite? Is our obedience free if we are not also free to disobey? My brethren, the truest liberty is voluntary restraint; that is freedom when all our impulses, our affections, and our powers move in spontaneous harmony under the bidding of a consecrated will. Our powerlessness and our restlessness are one; the supreme command received from the Father is an inspiration and an energy. Then have we power when we live only to obey. Self-assertion is here slain at its very root. Sometimes we regret that we are not able to resist God's will; we submit because we must, not because we choose. This feeling is at the bottom of all our murmuring and impatience—"if I could have it otherwise I would"—it is the rebellious will which is also the impotent will. It is very blessed to turn away from our own perversity and dwell on the perfect harmony of Christ's life in His perfect submissiveness to the Father. As the spirit that dwelt in Jesus, the spirit of the Son, dwells in us, we also shall understand "*the perfect law of liberty.*" The freedom of obedience is learnt as we

love to obey ; the fullest consciousness of power is that of power to accomplish the Father's will.

Christ's assertion of power is intended to illustrate His obedience. "*I lay down my life of myself.*" It was not the force of circumstances that compelled His death. At any moment He could have withdrawn Himself from the people, or He could, by yielding to their prejudices, have won the people to Himself. "*No man took his life from him.*" He had power over men ; He could have awed them simply by His majestic presence. The soldiers who were sent to take Him, when He stood before them, were stricken with terror, "*they went backward and fell to the ground.*" Without an effort, simply by the revelation of Himself, He could have subdued His foes ; a look, a word would have been enough. Christ had a marvellous power over men's consciences. He could read their hearts, arouse their slumbering convictions, and strike them powerless by His gaze. The Scribes and Pharisees, who brought unto Him the woman taken in adultery, trembled before Him like craven criminals before a judge. He did but lift Himself up and speak, and "*they which heard, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last : and Jesus was left alone.*" Pilate felt this power : when Jesus said to him, "*thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above,*" the heart of the ruler was moved with a strange fear ; the time-serving sceptic trembled, for his perversion of justice, his pollution of the judgment seat stood exposed to him. "*From thenceforth Pilate sought to release him.*" Christ speaks of a power that is greater still. The concealed aid of

heaven was yet at His bidding; the Father at his Son's appeal would have delivered Him. They are wondrous words, words speaking of a tenderness in the Father's heart which needed but to be invoked to spare Him; "*thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?*" Of this power too, the power upon the Father of the Son's cry, Jesus is conscious. But more than all is the strength of His submission. "*How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?*" He speaks of His power to show us how full was His obedience. His laying down His life is free and unconstrained. He chooses to lay it down because He has received this commandment of His Father.

It is an awful revelation of the powerlessness of sin which is given us in these words of Christ; the Jews simply tolerated in their crime against the Saviour; the long-suffering of God waiting; men pursuing their evil counsel, ignorant of the power that restrained itself, the power that, at any moment, might have utterly baffled and overcome them. It is a terrible thing for sinners to reflect how utterly impotent they are, that God is simply bearing with them in their sins. It commends the patience and the grace of Christ to know that He was thus patient and forbearing, in order that, when they had done their worst, the very Jesus whom they crucified should be proclaimed as risen from the dead to be their Saviour; and that "*repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name*" to each and all of them. But chief among the truths taught us in Christ's words is the fulness of His own obedience. With the purely human heart that shrinks from shame and suffering,

with the knowledge that deliverance is at any moment within His power, He goes on unto the end. To our rebellious wills, the consciousness that we might escape painful submission to God's will would often be itself the motive to disobedience. We are kept submissive by our weakness. But Christ, free and unconstrained, endured to the close. He recognises but the Father's purpose; He speaks not of power to avoid the sacrifice, but of power to make it; He rejoices in power to obey the Father's will. "*I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*"

II. Notice what Christ says of the Father's love. "*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again.*" We see the reason partly in the obedience of which we have been speaking. Christ knows no will except what the Father has ordained: "*even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight*"—these words express the consecration of His whole life. "*Therefore doth my Father love me;*" for this entire confidence the Son reposes in Him, this unity of purpose with Him, this filial devotedness. It is a sacred revelation given us of the oneness of the Father and the Son in love and fellowship: the Son rejoices to know and to obey the Father's will; the Father commits His whole counsel to the Son, that He may accomplish it; the Father and the Son have perfect rest and joy in one another.

But we must take our text in its connection with the parable which it follows, in order fully to apprehend Christ's words. The commandment of the Father was that Christ should "*lay down his life for the sheep.*"

The love of the Father for the Son is not an exclusive personal affection, a Divine delight from which all others are shut out. The reason of the Father's love of Jesus is that Jesus is so full of love for weak and sinful men. We have here given us a wondrous glimpse into the sacred recesses of the Godhead. We should not have dared to utter words like these, to fix on anything for which emphatically it might be said, "therefore doth the Father love the son." But when Christ has told us that the Father loves Him because He died for us, it would be, indeed, a strange ingratitude, a cold indifference to the value that God has set on us, if we refused to dwell upon the mighty revelation. We read in the book of Genesis that God did not "*rest*" in creation till He had made man in His own image; and there we learn that the Lord is not one who dwells in His own solitary glory, that His love is so bountiful that it seeks and forms objects on whom to lavish itself. We read in the book of Proverbs concerning the wisdom which "*the Lord possessed in the beginning of his way, before his works of old,*" the wisdom by which He made all things, that it "*rejoiced in the habitable part of the earth; and its delights were with the sons of men.*" So are we taught that the thought and tenderness of heaven were for ever attracted to needy, suffering, fallen men and women. But here we have words deeper, more tender, more surprising still. Why does the Father love the Son, is it asked? We might have said, Because He is His Son; and surely, if God has intended us to learn anything by the words Father and Son, such an answer would not be wrong. We should have contrasted a rebellious, unbelieving, sinful world with the perfect

Divine fellowship, and have said that the Father must turn from such a spectacle to look with infinite affection on the Son, in whom He was ever well pleased. But Christ speaks not thus. He shows us the Father's love rejoicing in Christ's devotion to such a world. Christ reminds us of the pity for lost men which is in God, and of the Father's pity finding response in the Son. Christ tells us of Him whose purpose was to win back the erring, and whose purpose was fully accepted by His Son. Christ speaks of Him who ordained that, by laying down His own life, the Son should restore the guilty, and of the Son choosing to lay down His life. Christ tells us of the Father sending His Son into the world, and of the Son's entire fidelity, His going on through weariness, and rejection, and scorn, to death: "*therefore doth my Father love me.*" For what He will lay aside; for the love in Christ which brought Him here; for the patience with which He "*endures so great a contradiction of sinners against himself;*" for the confidence He has that, by His death, the foolish, and wandering, and guilty shall be brought again into the blessedness of the Father's fold: for this the Father loves Him. How simple are Christ's words! The Father loves Him because He loves the sheep, and lays down His life for them. And yet how overwhelming is the revelation! There is not only a higher "*joy in heaven*" for sinners repentant and restored; the Father's love to the Son is seen waxing full when the pitying Saviour dies to redeem us to God.

It is not obedience merely for which Christ tells us that the Father loves Him, it is for obedience to this special commandment. We must view Christ accepting death

for us as the loving purpose of His Father; we must view the Son rejoicing in that love for us which leads the Father to ordain our redemption, and taking that redemption upon Himself; we must view the Father rejoicing that the Son accepts this purpose, and devotes Himself to its fulfilment, if we are to understand Christ's words "*therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.*" He loves Him for His sacrifice and sorrow; the Father loves the Son for the heart of love He sees in Him. It is not enough that the Father and Son are one, while we are estranged and guilty; "*that they, Father, may be one in us*"—this is Christ's prayer. For the spirit of such a prayer, and for the death by which it is fulfilled, the Father loves Him. As we rise to the height of so Divine a mystery, we can apprehend the words of the beloved disciple, "*God is love.*"

It is for our sakes that Christ has told us why the Father loves Him, that we may know the men who are dearest to God. That on which we set the most value is not always that on which God sets most value. We hold learning in high esteem; if a learned man does but condescend to say something patronizing of the Gospel, how we love to quote his words! We set a high esteem on wealth; if a rich man unites himself to a church, how ready we are to advance him to a place of trust! We honour a man for his intellect, for his mere force of will. God may be passing by all these; and looking rather with delight on meek and patient ones unnoticed by us, wrestling with many a difficulty, and seeking constancy of submission. God dwells with most delight on the obedient; His blessings are for the

mEEK. God dwells with most delight with the loving ; he who gives himself up in self-denial and effort for others, is God's choicest servant. Riches and power and wisdom and dignity, all were Christ's ; yet not for these does God love Him. "*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.*"

It is for our sakes that Christ has told us this, that we may understand His life and death. The Jews could not comprehend why, if Jesus was the Christ, He must die ; they could not understand that the Man of Sorrows was the Son of God. Therefore did God at Christ's baptism declare : "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.*" The disciples also thought that ease and dignity were God's special marks of favour ; they could not understand the call to sacrifice, the confidence of love. When Christ said that "*he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day ;*" they answered, "*Be it far from thee, Lord ; this shall not be unto thee.*" It cannot be, they thought ; God will not permit it. Therefore was it that before the last journey, the journey to the cross, Christ was transfigured before them, and the voice came again, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased ; hear ye him.*" The witness of the Father's confidence, and the reason of the Father's love, were that He laid down His life. Even yet, we are slow to apprehend that sacrificing love is the highest manifestation of the Father's blessed purpose in His Son. How many a reason has been given why Christ must die ! how many a theological argument has been invented to

account for so great a sacrifice! How poor all reasons seem before the simple one that He loved us! Love is a law unto itself; it asks not how little will suffice, it gives itself away. "*I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*"

It is for our sakes, once more, that Christ has told us this, in order that we may know God. Our real character is declared by our delight in others; the object of our affection and admiration reveals ourselves. If we make the man of force our hero, we shew ourselves to be worshippers of power. If we admire most of all the good man, this is evidence that it is goodness we most highly prize. Christ is dear to the Father because Christ loves us so fully; here is the witness how greatly God loves us. As we understand this to be the Father's good pleasure in His Son, all hard, distrustful thoughts of God will be for ever at an end; Christ's own confidence in the Father will fill our souls. "*They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.*" "*I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*"

III. Notice what Christ tells us is to be the issue of His laying down His life—"That I might take it again." The resurrection and ascension are to follow the crucifixion. Christ is to reap the reward of His sacrifice. He is to live for ever the "*captain of salvation made perfect through sufferings;*" to be the guard and guide and ruler of those for whom He laid down His life. "*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.*"

It is this which alone renders His sacrifice lawful or

even possible; this which distinguishes between sublimity of sacrifice and reckless prodigality, the scornful waste of self. It was not the Father's commandment that Christ should lay down His life and perish so. God sets too high a value on life for that. Nothing that comes from Him is wasted; self-denial is the way to higher blessedness; he who loses himself for others shall find himself again in others; the life which is yielded up for the ends of love is restored in the triumph of love.

The true character of trust in God is illustrated here. It would not be faith, it would be dark unbelief, to refuse to recognise that God in calling for sacrifice has also ordained its joyful issue. The certainty that God will defend the cause of the obedient is one of the most striking characteristics of Old Testament piety; the inspired utterances of this confidence have become the expression of the dearest Christian hope. *"I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."* *"I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."* It would not be like God to allow entire destruction to fall on those who give up all for Him. Faith rises to its height in the assurance that He is righteous to vindicate fidelity, and loving to reward it.

Nor can we call that love for men which is indifferent about sharing with them the joy of their restoration. We should hold him to be a scorner of us, rather than our friend, who would ask no fruit in all the gladness his sacrifice might win us, and would not care to see our gratitude. The contempt evinced by a resolve to give up all, indifferent about partaking the joyful issue, would make the sacrifice itself almost an affront. There is nothing of this in Christ. He does not despise our gratitude. He will not refuse the thankful homage of those who are saved through Him. "*I lay down my life that I might take it again.*" He anticipates the joy of "*bringing many sons unto glory,*" leading them as "*captain of their salvation,*" delighting eternally in every offering of their allegiance, every gift of their love.

We should, if the thought were possible, we should, though saved, enter heaven with sadness, if Christ had perished. There would be the feeling that our salvation was too dearly purchased; there would be quenchless yearning and dissatisfaction, the bitter sorrow that He was absent whose joy it would have been to behold the children whom He had redeemed. It is not such a heaven that is before us. The life "*laid down*" is "*taken again*;" He hath "*ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.*" He that hath ascended is the same also that descended, with the same full sympathy and loving heart, preserving the memory of the grief and bitterness, transformed now into the triumph, of the cross. Christ expects to share the joy of our salvation: He laid down His life for this. He "*for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,*

despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

I dwell at length on this part of our text, because it seems to me that much true and noble Christian teaching in our day is defective here. In revulsion from a former preaching which made happiness the end of life, the tendency is to overlook the triumph of endurance and the reward of faithfulness. The cross is preached without the resurrection; Gethsemane and Calvary without Olivet and heaven. Such a one-sided teaching is sure to end in weakness and disappointment. The "gospel of suffering" is not enough, it lacks moral power and permanence deprived of the all-sufficient issue which the suffering is sure to win. We cannot live thinking only of the sadness and struggle at the heart of things; accomplishment is required to justify the endurance. To labour in the hope of reward is not selfish; it is in the character of the expected reward that the selfishness or the generosity consists. We need the triumph to vindicate the suffering; the result of the sacrifice justifies its cost. The doctrine of self-sacrifice is indeed the essence of Christianity, but not alone. Such an atmosphere is not merely too rare for men to breathe, it is mephitic, deadly. It needs the sunshine of hope to stir and sweeten it. It is love alone which is sufficient for sacrifice, and love claims the hope of reunion and reward.

We learn here how to sustain ourselves in Christian struggle and endurance with the hope of Christian triumph. "*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him.*" There are times when we

grow weary and despondent. Will there be any triumph? or such a triumph as will make up for the trial and the toil? Will there be a joy sufficient for all the bitterness and struggle? When we question thus murmuringly, we are distrusting God. Such despondency is blasphemy. Our Father expects that we shall suffer in the assurance of abundant reward. The sacrifice of Christ is our rebuke; His was a sacrifice of faith. Christ's hope in the Father was, as much as His obedience of the Father, an expression of filial faith; the hope, as much as the obedience, made His offering well-pleasing to God. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life "*that I might take it again.*"



XIII.

PETER'S CONFESSION OF LOVE TO CHRIST.

JOHN xxi. 15—19.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

BEFORE we enter on the subject I have chosen for our meditation this morning—love to Christ, its confession, its proof and manifestation, its crown and perfecting—I wish, if I may be able, to give you a true apprehension of the scene and circumstances of this narrative. For the scene and circumstances were in-

tended by Christ to prepare Peter for the thrice-repeated question and the thrice-repeated charge ; it is, as we can imagine what memories the Lake of Galilee and the miraculous draught of fishes would call up in Peter, that we shall be able to recognise fully what Jesus would now teach him, and to take the lessons which here are written for our learning.

There are times in all our histories which reveal to us the mysterious identity of our ever-changing lives ; when we read old letters, or turn over pages on which long since we made our notes ; when we visit well-remembered scenes, from which the lapse of time, or a crisis of personal experience, has separated us ; when we grasp the hand of old friends, and the hours go rapidly by while we listen again to the familiar voice, or indulge in the silent luxury of their presence. You know the subtle influence of such seasons ; with what strangeness, yet with what reality, they recall the past, revealing us without an effort of self-examination to ourselves, enabling us to estimate the changes the months have wrought upon us. Far-off, yet very familiar, seems our old life to us ; we are not, we cannot be the men we once were ; yet that life is truly our own, it has left its eternal mark upon us, helped to make us the men we are to-day. Thoughts that have passed away for ever are recalled ; some dying, like the flower, never to be again ; others dying, like the seed, to bring forth much fruit. Impulses are recalled ; some that lived but a moment, others that became the habit of a life ; resolves unfulfilled, resolves that now are the settled purpose of our being ; failures and victories, mistakes and corrections, all come up before us. The

coincidences of life are designed by God to reveal us to ourselves, and to show what is God's guidance of our life. They need not be wasted in idle reverie ; they may occupy a serious place in our personal education. They may always leave us wiser and better, humbler and more hopeful, more penitent, more earnest men. The old experience is recalled, the old call repeated ; and a new life is before us, the ever-new present, wherein to prove the wisdom and fulfil the lessons we have learnt from the days gone by.

These verses record such a period in the life of Peter. The time is morning ; morning, so full of memories, so full of hope and high resolve. The mists are clearing from the lake and shore : the darkness is passing away, stirred by the fresh breeze of dawn. There are together those whose names are so often found associated ; Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana of Galilee, and the two sons of Zebedee. They are on the sea of Tiberias, fishing just as before Christ called them to be fishers of men. The fruitless night-toil, and their success, when in obedience to Christ, they cast their net on the right side of the ship, were fitted to remind them of His former miracle, and of their former call. John marks, as significant of a difference between this and the former miracle, that for all the fishes were so many, yet did not the net break. A hopeful difference, promising that their new mission should be better than the old. Called anew to draw men to Christ, they shall be better preachers than they were ; they shall not only "*catch men*" for the kingdom, they shall be enabled to bring them all in and retain them in the kingdom. The months that have gone by,

seemingly so fruitless ; months during which they made so many blunders, months which appeared to come to so entire a close in the death of their Master, have not gone by for nothing. Their past experience, their blunders and anxieties and sorrows, all will be seen to have fitted them for their new work, when again the Lord shall bid them to it. This, at least, we shall see to be true of Peter ; three times reminded of his weakness, three times made to feel the pains of penitence, he is each time bidden to tend the flock. He will be better able to tend the flock, because of what he has learnt of his febleness and folly.

The narrative seems to me full of subtle suggestions. It illustrates our Christian life, which is ever new, yet ever old ; full of strange events, the meaning of which becomes, as we muse upon them, familiar and intelligible. Every daybreak shows us the old world under new aspects ; the objects which loom so strangely in the obscurity, we see, as we gaze on them, to be quite familiar. In the dim morning light, the disciples knew not that it was Jesus who stood on the shore ; perhaps some mysterious change had passed upon Him in the grave, the risen Saviour not appearing quite like the Master whom they had followed ; but the miracle revealed that it was He. It was a new call with which he presently bade them, but it was the fulfilment of his first bidding, "*Follow me.*" It was a new miracle He wrought, a new experience through which they were passing now ; but how thoroughly was it the same with what had gone before ! It is this constant freshness and changeless identity of life, this novelty of circumstance having in it the old meaning of love and grace,

the new duty which is but a repetition of the old call, which makes us rejoice in the one purpose we perceive ever enlarging and fulfilling itself. It is as we recognise, "I am the same, and God is the same amid all changes," that we rest amid ceaseless variation, and learn the lessons to which, day by day, God is opening our ears.

No wonder that that morning's meal was a silent one. Seated once more by the lake of Tiberias, the boat stirred by the morning ripple, the boat to which they had returned after so long an absence with Jesus; taking once more bread and fish from His hands; the miracle once more wrought which taught them first of Christ's power and call, they would be more disposed for meditation than for speaking. The past was with them; what were its memories for Peter? Of eager haste and painful failure; of love for Christ so true and yet so powerless; of self-confidence and of unfaithfulness. With chastened, humbled spirit he must have sat and pondered; feeling that not in his devotedness to Christ, but in Christ's love to him; not in himself so boastful, yet so weak, but in his Lord, so watchful for His disciple, so wise to counsel, so tender and so earnest to warn, lay his hope that he might be faithful to his Apostleship, if he should be reinstated in it. And to these, his thoughts, Christ at length gives expression: "*Simon, son of Jonas,*" the name by which Christ had first called him, and which he had so often used in tender solemnity, "*Simon, son of Jonas,*" not Peter, the rock-like confessor, but Simon, the weak human disciple, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?*"

There is a beautiful order in Christ's questions which

is not at all indicated in our English version; which, indeed, scarcely could have been indicated, because we have but one word for love where the Greeks had two. The distinctions between the two Greek verbs are various and delicate; but they may all be traced to the radical difference between them. It is not a difference in the warmth, but in the character of affection. The one signifies the love based upon appreciation of another, the other simple personal attachment. The one word would express the love that would give itself up for another, the second word that which gives itself up to another. The one would be a confident, the other a confiding love. In this narrative, the one might be represented if, in English, we said, "I am thy friend;" the other, if we said, "Thou art my friend." It is the former of these words which Christ here uses: "Simon, son of Jonas, esteemest thou me more, art thou more my friend, than thy fellow disciples?" This was just what Peter had professed, "*Though all should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*" "*I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death;*" "*Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*"

You can now understand Peter's reply. Once he would have said, "I know that I am thy friend." Once he did assert his knowledge of himself against Christ's knowledge of him; he was sure he was to be trusted. But he has lost his self-confidence. He cannot compare himself with others now. He will not even assert himself to be a friend, ready, for Christ's sake, to devote himself, he will not profess esteem for Jesus. He chooses the humbler, trustful word: "*Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.*"

Again, Christ asks him, "If not more than these, yet art thou my friend at all? Is there any of the active, devoted love in thee? any of the passion that will assert itself in my behalf?" And still the same humble, clinging answer comes from Peter. Even this he will not affirm. How can he profess what he is ready for? how can he be confident who has so painfully learnt that there is nothing for him but meekly and gratefully to trust in Jesus? "*Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.*"

Now, Christ takes Peter's own word; He will not wound him by reminding him of his past boastful professions; let it be as Peter would have it, the trusting affection of the disciple. "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?*" "*Peter was grieved, because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?*" Surely, Jesus cannot doubt that. He must know that the disciple clings to his Lord. Christ must know that He is all in all to Peter. He saith unto Him, "*Lord, thou knowest all things; Thou seest my heart, Thou knowest what sort of a man I was and am, how vain my self-confidence; Thou knowest me to be weak, rash, changeful; but Thou knowest, too, that under all my boasting, all my mistakes, there was love for Thee, and that it remains. Lord, Thou knowest that I cannot make professions, that I am heart-sick of professions, but Thou knowest that this is true; thou knowest that I love thee.*"

And this confession Christ accepts; this confession He ever will accept. Distinguish between the profession of love to Christ and the confession of it. In profession, the person most prominent in our thoughts is "I, who make it;" in confession, "He, whose name I

am confessing." The confession of love to Christ is the sweetest language that can fall from human lips; it shews that the life has found its rest and meaning. Christ is known and He will keep faithful to all eternity; He will solace in all tribulation and succour in all difficulty; He will guide with his counsel, and afterwards receive to glory, every meek soul that utters it. The profession of love to Christ is painful to hear. It is full of danger; it is boastful, self-confident. He who makes it will have, by many a sore trial, through many a bitter experience of failure, to come to a humbler mind. It is not in what we are to Christ, but in what Christ is to us, that our rest and security lie.

Observe, too, the period of Peter's life when this confession is made. It is not his earliest confession; he has been brought to it through painful self-knowledge; it is the utterance of a tried maturity. It is a custom among many Christians to demand this as a pass-word to Christian fellowship, to refuse the recognition of discipleship to all who cannot utter it. I cannot think this is wise. To set young converts on an estimate of their feeling towards the Saviour, instead of encouraging them to trust in Him, is full of peril. Christian discipleship sometimes begins with love to Christ; and singularly blessed are they with whom it does. But in other ways souls are drawn to Christ; the weary go to Him for rest, the guilty for pardon, the helpless for succour; the dissatisfied, who long for a better life, seek the life that is in Christ. Such will say "I trust in Christ," "I have found Christ," "I am following Christ;" but the words, perhaps, halt on their lips, "I love Christ." It is not for us to insist on their utterance. They are not for

our ears, but for His. And He knows how, from the trusting, the obedient, and the earnest, to draw at length the full confession, "*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*"

II. Notice the proof and manifestation of love to Christ.

In giving Peter the charge, "*Feed my lambs; Feed my sheep,*" Christ was guarding him against a danger to which he was at this moment liable; the danger of sinking down into an indulgence of sentiment; of dwelling upon the words, "*Thou knowest that I love thee,*" and forfeiting in this sweet humiliation his calling as an apostle and its prize. There is a subtle charm in self-humiliation, an ensnaring luxury of penitence. We feel it in a self-assertive world. From the blare of trumpets, from the strife for mastery, from the restlessness of ambition, and the constant temptation to self-seeking, how blessed to retire to self-abasement before the Lord; how sweetly then from lowly lips falls the confession, "*Thou knowest that I love thee.*" To cherish this life alone is very dangerous. Hence comes the pride that apes humility; hence self-pleasing under the garb of lowliness. Worse than the hypocrisy which disfigures its countenance that it may appear unto men to fast, is the subtle insincerity that disfigures itself that it may appear unto itself to fast. Christ sends Peter from confessing, as he sent Mary from adoring Him, to do His work. The world is the true sphere for lowliness; loving labour among others is the school of self-humiliation; love of Christ is perfected in the activities of a human sympathy.

It was in separating himself from the other disciples,

in supposing himself better than they, that Peter displayed the self-confidence which he now so bitterly repented. He was not free from the temptation even in his penitence. It is possible to separate ourselves from others in our very consciousness of self-distrust. We may think ourselves better than they, not only in what we profess ourselves ready to do, but also in our declarations that we cannot make any profession at all. One of the saddest sights is that of men whose humblest words are a vaunting of themselves, whose very lowliness is sentimental and insincere.

There is variation, too, in Christ's thrice repeated charge, "Feed my lambs, Shepherd my sheep, Feed my little sheep." All were to be cared for, and all modes of watchfulness and help to be displayed. Fold as well as feed them; guide and guard and heal them; keep them from straying, strengthen the feeble, bind up the bruised, bring again that which is driven away, seek that which is lost.

A higher work is now committed to Peter than when Christ said "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" The pastoral office is higher than that of preaching the gospel of the kingdom; to watch over the flock is higher than to add to its numbers. In all this work of instruction and discipline; in reproof, rebuking and exhorting; in bringing erring disciples to penitence, in patiently enduring the perversity of men and women, and correcting them when wrong; in restoring the contrite, and guiding the repentant to better ways; in stimulating hope in the despondent, and helping those who would reform, Peter should be able to prove his love to Jesus. Bring your devotional feeling to a prac-

tical test; let it be not a sentiment merely, but a power. "*This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God loveth his brother also.*"

Here, too, would Peter have an opportunity for the constant exercise of lowliness. He would grow meek and gentle, as he fed the lambs and shepherded the sheep. He would be humbled by every lesson he learnt of men's impatience and folly and self-deception. Loving labour among our fellows is the best school of self-humiliation. Sympathy is the way to self-knowledge; our own penitence deepens as we know a brother's sins. All these wayward, erring sheep would ever remind Peter of his own wayward, erring heart. These things serve us as "*ensamples,*" and from them we may take the admonition, "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*"

They would serve, too, to deepen his love of Jesus; every brother's fall would remind him of his own restoration; the love of Christ to him, Peter, would recur to him with fresh force as contrite ones were led by him to trust the gracious Lord. There is nothing which so deepens our love to Christ as the larger knowledge of His grace which we gain as we see souls saved by Him; when the eternal, unchangeable, ever faithful grace of Christ is revealed to us in the salvation and gratitude of redeemed multitudes, we shall say with deeper, lowlier sincerity, because of our fuller knowledge of Him, "*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*" It is not in solitary self-discipline, but in intercourse with our fellows, that faith rises to adoration, and the love of attachment becomes the higher love of intelligent esteem.

In this work which Christ assigns to Peter, Peter may see the meaning of the struggle of contrition through which he is made to pass. It was painful to be thus reminded of his boastfulness, his weakness, and his sin. But, as his heart is softened by the memory of his denial, Christ commends to him the flock. He will be better able to bear with them because he knows himself. The heart broken with penitence will scarcely harden itself against a sinful brother. That penitence is worth little, whatever its intensity of feeling, which does not teach us sympathy and forbearance and hopefulness for all. Here, too, we learn how to gain power over human souls. Peter could warn and comfort and speak with persuasiveness of Jesus, because, wrung with sorrowful self-knowledge, he had found no other comfort.

III. The crown and perfecting of love to Christ is that full self-surrender by which we shall glorify God. To Peter it came in the form of martyrdom. The story is told of him that he died upon a cross, at his own request crucified with his head downwards, as being unworthy to die like his Lord. It is quite in harmony with his character as read in the New Testament. A peculiar tone and pathos attaches to all his references to suffering for Christ's sake. Others of the early confessors are patient, hopeful amid persecutions; Peter glories in them, rejoicing to be partaker of Christ's sufferings. So was the self-will of the apostle entirely subdued. The eager, turbulent heart was quelled by advancing years; trial hallowed his spirit, and he glorified God by his death. When he was young he girded himself, and walked whither he would. How often he wandered, how far astray his hasty will led him! But when he could no

longer go whither he would, when another girded him and carried him whither he would not, he accepted the appointment, and the surrender of himself was complete.

In one way or other, this privilege, that we glorify God, is given to every one who loves Jesus. Not all need the struggle and the martyrdom. There are meek souls whose whole life is sacrifice, whose will is ever submissive. Others require a sharp discipline, the pressure of circumstances, the subduing power of tribulation. Whatever is needed will be given. We sometimes wonder at the varied character of Christian living and of Christian dying. There are those whose youth is serene and simple, their life a quiet ripening, age mellows rather than changes them, and their death is the peaceful close of a peaceful life. There are others whose wills are earnest, but often rebellious; in whom passion now rises to marvellous inspirations of Christian devotedness, now swells to turbulence; whose life is fitful and incomplete; in these the subduing influence of old age is often seen. Sorrow purges them, temptation tries and perfects them. And death seems appointed as the completion of all; the chequered, troubled life is vindicated as a Christian life by the death that glorifies God. I am persuaded that the special appointment of such a life and such a death for different persons has its reason in the special discipline which is needed for them. To us all, if only we love Christ, there is the assurance that self-will shall be subdued; that in the way of God's appointment we shall be able to glorify Him.

“And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him,

Follow me." It was the first call again repeated. When Peter had first heard it, he thought that to obey it would lead him near a throne; now he knows it will conduct him to a cross. Yet he draws not back; for meanwhile he has been with Jesus, and love of Him now fills his soul. What dreams possess us of the honour and triumphs of the Christian life when first we rank ourselves as disciples of Christ? what shall not be our attainments? what are we not ready to do? to what signal eminence may we not expect to rise? Rarely indeed are these hopes fulfilled; we grow wiser, with sad self-knowledge we become holier, men. The boundless prospect narrows before us; we are well content "to fill a little sphere, so He be glorified." If we do follow Christ, we shall never draw back because of disappointment. Let the illusions of life all vanish, it is enough to be with Christ. The love of Jesus has power to fill the heart; to follow Him is the passion and purpose of our life.

"*Follow me.*" It is the universal call of the Christian life. We follow Thee, our Saviour. Be it Thine to appoint our mode of serving and glorifying Thee; ours to follow whither Thou wouldest have us go.



XIV.

A WHITSUNDAY MEDITATION.*

ACTS II. 1—4.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

THE feast of Pentecost was associated by the later Jews with the giving of the law. Reckoning fifty days from the middle of the first month, we are brought to the beginning of the third month, the time when (Ex. xix. 1) we are told the children of Israel came into the wilderness of Sinai. At this day the Jews call the feast of Pentecost the feast of the law; "some of them adorn their houses with flowers, and wear wreaths on their heads, with the declared purpose of testifying their joy in the possession of the law. They also eat such food as is prepared with milk," in symbol of the purity of the Divine law, "*the sincere milk of the word.*" Some Christian commentators, devoted to rabbinical lore, have

* Preached on Whitsunday, June 9th, 1867.

adopted this interpretation, and associate the giving of the old law with the constitution of the church, with its new and diviner precepts. Under Sinai, they say, Jewish national life began, the law being the bond of the people's unity. At Pentecost began a larger fellowship; the Holy Ghost is the bond "which, amidst all outward differences, is to unite for evermore the souls of all God's believing children." The church, with its larger life and holier order, dates back to the first Christian, as the Israelitish nation to the first Jewish, Pentecost.

This interpretation is not found in Jewish writings till long after the dispersion; nor does it receive any countenance from the Bible. The day of Pentecost was the feast of first-fruits, the day when the earliest wheat was made into two leavened loaves, and brought into the temple, with lambs and drink offerings, to be first presented and then eaten before the Lord. The idea of the celebration is simple enough; it was an expression of gladness and gratitude to God for His bountiful gifts to His people. It was an act of natural worship; the Jews within the temple were mindful of what God was doing without, on hillsides and in valleys. They first acknowledged the care and bounty that fed them, and then they did eat of His gifts "*with gladness and singleness of heart.*"

There is a Christian as well as a Jewish year; we cannot be, we ought not to be, unmindful of the changes around us, all of which illustrate God's holy counsel, His tender conduct of the lives of His children, and the history of mankind. God speaks to us in rain, and sunshine, and fruitful seasons; the author of natural and spiritual life is one, and His works are one. Pictures

of His hidden operations lie all around ; He gives many a hint, many a memorial of His gracious purpose in the changes of the year. Christ has taught us to see in seed-sowing a symbol of the cross, and a call to Christian sacrifice. The one great law of life out of death, fruitfulness out of self-devotion, is illustrated in the "*corn of wheat,*" that, "*except it die, abideth alone ; but if it die, bringeth forth much fruit.*" The "*harvest,*" the solemn fruitful autumn-time, reminds us of "*the end of the world,*" and has its strangely blended influences of mournfulness and hope. Spring is a type of the resurrection ; life bursting out of the grave, life fuller, fresher, better than that which has been laid down. Of all beautiful, blessed symbols of the Christian life, this early summer-time is the most blessed. Calm as these warm and not yet sultry days ; peaceful as early June mornings ; fresh as the dews and showers ; rich as the verdure of our landscape, it is given us sometimes to feel, and always to know, that our Christian life is, under the silent energy of the Spirit of Christ and of God. God is "*making all things new ;*" the reviving world speaks of that gracious renewal of humanity which, checked sometimes, and apparently proceeding slowly, we can yet see to have followed on the winter of the cross.

A Western summer is, indeed, not so early nor so rapid as an Eastern summer ; neither is our moral and spiritual life so rapid in its progress as that of Eastern men. There are no harvest sheaves to-day wherewith to deck English churches ; we must wait many weeks for the leavened loaves of the first-ripe wheat. But the trees are clad with verdure, and the

scent of roses is in the air. The pinks and pansies are bearing their first and richest flowers; the first crops, freshest and daintiest, are in our markets and on our tables. A tender life is working all around; more tender than the Eastern summer, if also more slow. There is here symbolised the soft and genial Christian life. God is giving an annual lesson to us who, amid the changes and troubles and temptations of the world, so soon grow stern and gloomy and despondent. We should be thankful for this beautiful early summer. We should listen while God speaks from the Bible and the land. We shall enjoy the season more, shall find it a holier season to us, if we can feel in it God's teaching of the gracious energy of His Spirit that breathes through nature, and the renewed, the Christian life.

I. The Passover and Pentecost were intimately connected. The day of Pentecost was reckoned from the time of the Passover. The injunction to keep the feast of first-fruits concludes, "*and thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt;*" the rejoicing followed the commemoration of the deliverance. The Jews call the day of Pentecost the "concluding festival;" *i. e.*, the festival that concludes the Paschal celebration. The association is not difficult to trace. The national life of Israel was the sequel to their deliverance from Egypt. It was not enough for them to be set free from the yoke of their masters; to be led into the desert was not the end God had in view when, with terrible signs, He brought them out of their bondage. In the wilderness, the careless and ungodly among them, appalled by the dreary barren tract around, lusted after the flesh-pots of

Egypt, and craved to return; and the godly were sustained by the hope of the promised land, where they should dwell in peace. God did not design to keep them in the wilderness; He had prepared a country for them, a "*goodly land and large,*" a "*land flowing with milk and honey,*" a land of "*corn-fields,*" whose hills were covered with "*vines and olives,*" and crowned with "*cedars of Lebanon;*" a land needing greater labour and more careful cultivation than Egypt, but yielding better fruits; a land where they should eat, not the rank leek and onion, the "*herb of the field,*" but corn and wine and oil, that should give them a tougher sinew, and a more healthy vigour. The feast of Pentecost was their memorial that God had fulfilled His promise. They brought the fruits of their own land before Him, the land which He had given them; they remembered year by year that He blessed their toil, that He made the land bring forth abundantly, and was nourishing the men He had redeemed.

The Passover was the symbol of redemption; the feast of Pentecost commemorated the life into which they had been redeemed. Spiritual life is the sequel of Christian redemption; the gift of the Holy Ghost was God's purposed supplement of Calvary. Spiritual history begins with the cross, but it does not end there. A man's conversion is the signal period in his experience, his deliverance from the gloom, the curse, the bondage of his sins; but God's purpose is not accomplished till the man abounds in all the energies of a holy life. It sometimes happens that the first gladness and gratitude of a forgiven soul are followed by a strange restlessness and dissatisfaction. For a while, the sense of freedom

from guilt, from the old distracting consciousness and care, is all-sufficient ; the man can breathe who scarce dared breathe before ; to be rid of the terrible burden of the past, to behold the exceeding grace of God, to know that the awful sacrifice was offered for his redemption, is to him sufficient joy. But, gradually, as life resumes its former current, and the solemn agitations of fear passing into joyful trust abate, there is a sense of something yet wanting. There is a strangeness in his efforts after the Christian activities that are to prove his thankfulness ; the formalities of a new profession are not enough for him, and the man may be moody and fitful. His friends look on in wonder and with some anxiety ; cheerfulness seems to have fled from the face of the converted one ; his desires appear vague, he behaves as one who knows not what he would be at ; and perhaps the scoffs at the oddness of his doings, at his want of Christian geniality, may not be pointless. A little while, and another change is gradually wrought upon him. Formal restriction is seen passing into the freedom of a well-ordered spirit. Faith is a rest to his soul, and hopes are blooming in his path, and love is putting itself forth in kindly consideration, and the man settles down into a beautiful meekness, and truth adorns his speech as with sweetest flowers, and tastes and habits form themselves at the bidding of gracious impulses, and a fulness of joy is his, infinitely peaceful to himself, and very attractive to all about him. His Paschal time, of haste and scarce-quelled anxiety, of girded loins and unleavened bread and bitter herbs, has been succeeded by the peaceful Pentecost. God's gift of life has been received by him ; the ransomed soul is rejoicing in the freedom and fulness of spiritual life.

It is not till this divine life is formed within us by God's Spirit, strong as the forces of summer that clothe the earth with summer beauty, that we can fully commemorate the death of Christ which is our redemption. The loss is illustrated by the gain; the anguish and the love of Christ are only known by him who is partaker of the life of Christ. Not till then do we "*consent to*" the doctrine of the Cross; at first we submit to it, then we accept and glory in it. Not till then do we see the love that utters itself in the law; the awful constraints, the "necessities" of righteousness are dear with unutterable sanctity to him who "*walks in the Spirit.*" We keep our Paschal feast in "*sincerity and truth;*" our hearts consenting to the sad realities of condemnation, and accepting redemption through Christ's blood, with infinite gratitude and infinite delight in Him; when our Passover is followed by the Pentecostal gift of life imparted and sustained by the very Spirit of our God.

The Holy Ghost was needed by the men who were to be preachers of the cross. He not only unfolded to them its meaning; He dwelt in them an energy tender, earnest, and strong, like that of Christ the Redeemer. How, without the Spirit and the life of Christ within them, could they have proclaimed as a message of salvation and God's good news of forgiveness, the fact which was the utter condemnation of the men who heard them? If Peter did not take his sword, no longer aiming at the ear, but in frantic efforts seeking the heart, of his Master's murderers, it was because a better mind was in him. If James and John did not wish to call down fire from heaven on the city that crucified their Lord, it was because they had received another spirit than their own.

It is very touching to think of these men remaining among the people they knew to be so guilty, urging them to repent, and promising them forgiveness ; to think of these men going out with joy and hopefulness, the fulness of the life in them pouring itself out in strength upon the cripple, and healing to the sick ; the very men who, but a little while ago, had been contentious and hot and angry. It was the life within them, divinely given, and divinely nourished, which made their demeanour so like their Lord's demeanour, and their influence attractive and holy like His. Nay, whence their heart, their power to labour in Christ's name at all ? The Spirit of Christ revealed to them the mind of Christ, and was in them an overflowing joy and confidence. The hopeful, genial Christian life was the inspiration of their courage, the source of their patience, their energy to suffer and to bear. It welled up in the dungeon where, with scarred backs and unwashed wounds and feet fast in the stocks, Paul and Silas prayed at midnight, and sang praises to God. It made them rejoice that they were "*counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's name ;*" it bound them to one another in an all-embracing brotherhood ; it sent them out "*everywhere preaching the word ;*" and it won multitudes to penitence and to the obedience of the truth. They had life in them ; and nothing could suppress their faith, their gladness, or their labours. They had life in them ; and by all the genial force of life, men were constrained by their influence, and drawn into their communion.

My brethren, if Christian teaching is ineffective, it is because it lacks the force of Christian life. And by life I mean not conduct, not habits, not efforts ; but the inward

life which gives tone to our conduct, and temper to our association with men, and character to all our deeds. Our doctrine may be scrupulously orthodox, yet very repellent; our teaching carefully accurate, yet very cold. Our efforts may be unnumbered, and our plans most wisely organised; yet, without the love, the earnestness that only life can give, they will be all in vain. Is the meaning of this day of Pentecost sufficiently understood? is it remembered, that then was given a Holy Spirit to abide with us, who has never left the world? There is something for us besides to pray for the divine life; it is to live it. Christians sometimes ask that "*the Spirit may be poured out.*" He has been poured out, and they who but recognize Him, and submit themselves to Him, find Him with them and in them still. The Spirit of Christ, which is the Christian inward life, will give force to all teaching, and holy energy to all effort. This will subdue, this will win men. The hard and humbling lessons of the cross—and we must not make them one jot less hard and humbling—will melt the heart when life compels their utterance and lends them earnestness. The tenderness of the Eternal Father, the sacrifice of the beloved Son, will constrain, when these are in us, not mere arguments, but our spirit and our life. Full of divine charity, full of faith and hope and joy, we shall also be full of power. The "*life in the Spirit*" will be seen in the "*fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;*" the power that produces these in us will add many souls as "*first-fruits*" to God and the Lamb.

II. Pentecost was a memorial of God's constant presence and power. The feast was ordained to remind

the Jews who it was who gave them their corn and wine and oil. They were not permitted to eat of the year's harvest till the first lambs had been waved before the Lord, and the two loaves offered to Him; lest they should think that the earth brought forth fruit of itself, lest they should be undevout, and gluttonous, and drunken in their feasts. This was the consecration of the "*first-fruits*" which would hallow the "*whole lump*" of which they were daily partaking. Pentecost was to remind them that the same Lord who had delivered them out of Egypt was watching over them still, year by year putting life and fruitfulness for them into wheat and vine and olive. The Jews, like Englishmen, were prone to practical atheism; they, like Englishmen, only recognized God in signal events of their history, unmindful of the care that was daily mindful of them, and the bounty which daily made them glad. All piety decays when we forget that the "Father" is "ever working;" to connect God only with certain events in experience and history is to lead a life that, on the whole, will be godless. It is to deprive ourselves of the consolations that will cheer, and the sanctities that will hallow our daily toils, our eating and drinking, and our pleasures.

God would have Israel live in Canaan as men who had been redeemed. Christians, too, should learn to associate Christ not only with times of conversion, with sacraments and public worship, with special seasons in experience, special revivals of religious feeling, and special periods of consecration in life and effort; but to be ever living in Christian gratitude and Christian sanctity. "*Do this in remembrance of me*" were Christ's

words at the last supper. "*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him,*" is the injunction of the Apostle Paul; and then immediately follow counsels to wives and husbands, children and parents, servants and masters, how they are to live. Body and soul, as well as spirit, have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Food and raiment, house-room and friends, have been given us by the same Father who gave us His Son. The power that quickened the world from the cross is ruling over it still; the love that shines in the cross gives summer flowers and autumn fruits. By the same energetic presence, the same personal activity that awakens men into spiritual life, is the earth made to bring forth and bud. Bread and wine are holy things, to be received with thanksgiving; the strength derived from them, the feeling with which they are taken causing them to be holy, "*as becometh saints.*"

Men who see nothing more than forces of nature in the power that yearly clothes the hill-sides, and makes the valleys fruitful, nothing more than "an order of things" in the benign and beautiful laws which regulate all growth, see too in the Christian life nothing more than human nature under new developments. It is the influence of certain ideas, they say, that affects men to new modes of thought and feeling; amendment, reformation, improvement, are the words they use instead of restoration, renewal, sanctification.

Of course the truth as it is in Jesus is adapted to God's purpose in its revelation. God deals with us as reasonable beings; He speaks to us as to "*wise men.*" The special message of the Gospel produces its fitting

effect upon us. Of course the spirit of man obeys the laws of its constitution. Christian life is not a vague and wayward set of impulses, obeying no eternal law. We are not true to the nature God has given us till the new life of Jesus unfolds within us. But just as, in the order of the universe, it is the Father who is ever working out His kind purpose towards all His creatures; so is it His power that imparts the very life to which alone the truth is perceptible, and it is He who is ever giving us the Spirit whereby we live.

The day of Pentecost is the witness of a Divine person abiding near us, and working in us all the energies and influences of a Christian life. It tells us how He came down from heaven who wrought in men a mighty change, putting within them a new life, so that they felt differently because they were different, and thought differently because of the change in their feeling. The new ideas followed the new life, not the new life the new ideas. Changes of thought are much more the creatures than the authors of changes of being. It is a most blessed truth this of the Holy Ghost coming down to abide with men and in them; coming near them, influencing them, drawing them to truth, to Jesus, and to God. If it takes away our self-complacency, it takes away the sense of loneliness which must belong to any man who thinks that he alone teaches, and guides, and amends himself. It prevents our falling into that despondency which must be our lot if we have none to trust in but ourselves. It gives us the blessedness of dependence on an unchangeable person, ever wise, ever strong, ever

gentle, although we fall into folly, and become weak, and find our hearts very hard. It is the hope of our deliverance; for it is from self, with its depraved tendencies, and wild longings, and unholy habits, that we need to be delivered. It gives us the sense of a blessed companionship, and a watchful, tender guidance, which sanctifies our being with love, and adds to duty the constraint of personal regard. And it is our joy to know that when our words fail, and the truth itself is denied or misconceived, that when we see in men an evil state as the secret of all their misbelief, a blind heart as the real cause of their indifference; there yet is the energy of a Holy Spirit moving in the depths of human souls, who changes the evil state, and opens the blind eyes, and gives life which is ever the great revealer. The human spirit is needed for the knowledge of human things; and a spirit that is of God for the knowledge of divine things. Where we are powerless, He imparts life; and then truth becomes plain, and motives are felt that we could not awaken; and that life shall yet unfold itself in all Christian works and ways, in all Christian gladness and godliness and strength.

Earnest Christian people need the teaching of the day of Pentecost. There are many who connect the Holy Ghost only with their conversion, with periods of high-wrought emotion, with sudden impulses of wisdom, sudden changes of feeling, sudden flashes of light on God's truth. To trace these to God's Spirit is often most proper; but not to suppose that where these are absent there is not the Holy Ghost. In quiet household duties; and long and patient watchings that often have their issue in events that seem sudden in their

coming ; in the calmness of devotion and the peace of self-denial ; in labours that pass unheeded and efforts to be good ; in the whole range of Christian life, however varied to our feeling, the Spirit, the source of life, is working. Yes, and in hearts that have not yet yielded themselves to Jesus ; in souls that He is seeking to quicken, and with which He is at strife ; in children born into godly households, and abandoned ones listening wonderingly to new words of hope and love ; in providential circumstances ; in marvellous transformations of thought and habit long concealed but one day to be made known ; by words of kindness and deeds that flow from a heart of love, by scattered stories, from the pages of the dispersed Bible ; in everything that has a Christian tendency, in every influence that comes from Christ and moves towards Him, "*worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*"

A few weeks ago, and though we knew, we did not feel, that summer was nigh. The snow was falling, and the keen north winds were nipping the too early buds. The trees were bare, and the earth was hard, and we cowered and shivered beneath the chilling blast. But God was working ; the spirit of life was moving in the sluggish sap, the sun was gathering force, and the western winds were on their way to us with refreshing showers. And lo ! the summer is here ; and every tree is a bower glad with the song of birds ; and the earth is gay with colour, and the air is laden with perfume. We remember to-day, as we have remembered with humble gladness before, that though to us there is winter, there never is a time when the loving

Father is not preparing food and ministering life to His creatures.

Toil we on, dig still the ground though barren, and labour though in ungrateful soil. Let us bare our hearts in preparation for the sunshine, even if the clouds are overhead. Let us sow the seed ; let us cultivate habit, and study truth ; let us be faithful to duty and to precept. Let us work according to God's will among ungracious men, and on our most ungracious selves. And we shall one day see the glad and genial life that the Divine Spirit is accomplishing ; for He is near us and is in us still. "*I have planted, Apollos watered ; and God gave the increase.*"



XV.

THE INTERCESSION OF THE SPIRIT.

ROMANS viii. 26, 27.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities : for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

THE intercession of the Holy Spirit as a matter of Christian experience—this is the subject to which I would direct your thoughts this morning. I say *as a matter of experience*, for it is thus presented to us here. The groanings of which our text speaks are groanings of our hearts ; the movings of desire too deep for us to utter, longings the mode of whose fulfilment we cannot anticipate. We are not conscious of their source ; the Apostle declares the Divine Spirit to be their author. We know not wherefore they are kindled nor the purpose they are designed to serve : the Apostle declares that God perceives their true meaning ; they are a helping of our infirmities, a part of the training of fallen and imperfect souls, a means by which God is preparing us for blessings which, as yet, we cannot

understand. But we are conscious of the state and struggle of desire; we feel our hearts possessed by longings which the intellect cannot form into conceptions, and which the tongue therefore cannot clothe in words.

Herein, too, lies the difference between the intercession of the Spirit and the intercession of Christ. Christ's "*intercession for us at the right hand of God*" is a fact revealed; the intercession of the Spirit is a fact of our experience. We believe, what we can neither see nor feel, that "*we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;*" we know that "*the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us;*" because we feel the inexpressible longings which He inspires within us.

Indeed we may say broadly, although it is not wise to attempt to limit Divine operations by our definitions, that there is this difference between the mission of Christ and the work of the Spirit. God revealed to us; this, is speaking generally, our conception of Christ: God revealing Himself *in us*; this is our thought concerning the Holy Ghost. God's succour and salvation as an object of faith; this is the doctrine of the mission of the Divine Son. God's succour and salvation a matter of experience; this is the doctrine of the work of the Holy Ghost. Christ is preached to us as the object of our trust; the faith which the Holy Ghost inspires in us is something we are conscious of. We are told that "*we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;*" the Holy Spirit in us is a spirit of sonship, we feel ourselves God's children, and we cry from the heart, "*Abba, Father.*" "*Remission of sins in Christ's name*" is "*preached among all nations;*" "*the law of the Spirit*

of life in Christ Jesus makes us free," free consciously and in fact, "*from the law of sin and death.*" The Scripture doctrine of sanctification is, that "*by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*" The "*sanctification of the Spirit*" is the actual experience of this in the purifying of our thoughts through the faith of Christ, the awakening and strengthening in us of holy desires and purposes, the living of the life which is according to godliness, the being changed into the very image of the Lord.

One or two simple illustrations will set before us the twofold intercession. An elder sister will, in two ways, intercede on behalf of an undutiful little one. She will plead with her parents for the forgiveness of the child; will speak of the power of the child's temptation, of his ignorance and inexperience; will remind them of the heedlessness and haste that are natural to children; she will urge that the child is now repentant, and will win the by no means reluctant parents to forgiveness. But the older and wiser sister will do also more; she will plead with the disobedient child himself, will speak to him of the sin of disobedience, remind him of their parents' goodness, of the grief they feel because of his undutifulness, of their love which only awaits his first appeal to show itself; and bringing the little one repentant and confessing will reconcile child and parents once more. In both ways she "*makes intercession;*" touching the parental heart which she knows to be already favourable to her appeal, pleading with the child till she awakens the desire to be forgiven.

The intercession of Christians for one another is of this twofold character. The Apostle James tells us to

“*pray one for another,*” and assures us that there is mighty power in such intercession. He also tells us to “*confess our faults one to another,*” reminding us that transgressors must be brought to personal repentance before their sins can be forgiven, and that we have power to lead one another to penitence and bring one another to God.

Now the Bible, in its simple human language, teaches us to conceive thus of the Divine intercession. Humanity, in all its frailty and sinfulness, has an advocate with God. God, in all His sanctity of righteousness and love, has a perpetual advocate with man. Christ is with the Father, “*making intercession for us:*” the Holy Ghost is within us, awakening the desire for forgiveness, moving us to penitence, prompting us to confession, and so making intercession here. Each is a true intercession with God on our behalf. As truly as Christ is winning us blessings by pleading for us in heaven, is the Holy Ghost winning us blessings when He prompts the desire for them, when He helps our infirmities, causing us to bring our wants to God, “*with groanings which cannot be uttered.*”

The intercession for pardon is an illustration of our text. So, too, is the intercession for grace. The New Testament bids us remember for our comfort the human experience of Christ. Christ knows our frailty and the power of temptation. “*We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*” Christ is pleading for us: “*Father, thy children are weak and trembling; succour them.*” The Holy Spirit is teaching us our infirmities, giving us to feel how weak

we are against temptation, how high and arduous is the life to which we are called; leading us to cry, "Father, we are weak and trembling; succour us."

But these are only illustrations, they are far from exhausting the meaning of our text. Indeed these are not the thoughts which are chiefly in the Apostle's mind; he is speaking of wants too deep for utterance. We must connect the groanings of which this verse makes mention with the groanings mentioned in verses 22 and 23. Paul has been speaking of the burden that oppresses creation, of the hope of which creation is full; of the feeling that pervades all nature of a curse, an imperfection, a subjection to vanity: of the sense of disappointment in nature, its inability to satisfy the hopes itself arouses, of the longing it awakens in the heart and leaves unfilled; he has been speaking of the expectancy of nature, the promise which breathes in every dewy morning and every glowing sunset, of a bright and perfect consummation, the precise mode of which creation does not know. And he tells us that there is the same unutterable feeling, the same vague quenchless yearning in "*ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit;*" that we are oppressed by a doom whose workings we cannot trace, and that out of our doom we are being delivered into a glory that we do not know.

I suppose we have all been conscious of a deep feeling of something wrong in us that no words can express. After all we have apprehended and said about our need of pardon and purging, after the clearest doctrinal exposition of sin and the woeful ruin it has wrought, we have been aware of a feeling deeper than all our

thoughts ; we have been dissatisfied with our most distinct utterances, our feeling is too vast for any words. When, too, we have as clearly and fully as we could, thought out what our redemption involves ; when we have tried to conceive a state of sinlessness, of undisturbed communion with God, and swiftest obedience to His will, and entire confidence in His goodness, we have felt how little we have done to bring our hope near to us ; the glory of the sons of God must be far more than we can conceive. We feel more than we know about the ruin of our sinfulness ; we hope for a blessedness that we see not and cannot utter. If then, bewailing the poverty of our conceptions, we have gone to the Throne of Grace ; if we have tried to pray as we have been feeling, we must have struggled as men oppressed with infirmity : “ *we know not what to pray for as we ought ;*” thought has failed us, no words would utter our longings. But yet, in going thus to God, we have been helped ; we have been calmed as our spirits have mutely breathed towards God. Unspeakable desire has filled our heart ; “ *with groanings that cannot be uttered*” we have looked up to God ; we have been borne on other wings than those of our own thought towards the heavenly throne : and the certainty that our heart has been searched, that God has recognised the meaning of our unutterable groaning, has received it as a prayer, an act of adoring submission, of confiding trust in Him, has come to us full of helpfulness and peace. Paul tells us that this is the intercession of the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit itself has been helping our infirmities.

Again, the longing for communion with God is often unutterable. There is a power in prayer when we offer

definite petitions ; when love prompts supplication for a particular person, or penitence draws nigh to confess some remembered fault ; when, knowing ourselves, we single out our own sins from the general acknowledgment, and ask for help in evercoming these ; when anticipating the temptation to which we are most prone to yield, we cry, "lead me not into this temptation, but deliver me from this evil." But there is a yet mightier energy of prayer when we are led to God, not to ask for any special blessing, but only that we may call Him Father. The spirit at peace with God often longs simply to be with Him. What want we at the throne of grace ? We want God Himself : "*My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.*" "*my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.*" "*Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*" We ask for no blessing, for we are fully blessed ; but "*our soul breaketh for the longing,*" it hath unto God. All thought, all feeling is swallowed up in one intense desire for God. In silence we look up to Him, peaceful in His presence. No words fall from our lips but the broken accents "Father, Father ;" the longing for God breathes forth in sighings that cannot be uttered.

Once more ; the longing for submission to God is also at times unutterable. It may be so because of a conflict of feeling. Some of you know what it is to say with Christ, "*Father, save me from this hour ;*" to kneel with Him in Gethsemane, and pray that the cup may pass from you. But against the pleading weakness of the flesh the spirit utters its protest ; you know the conflict, the "*agony*" of prayer. As yet you cannot say, "*for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name ;*"

"not my will, but thine be done." This is what the inner spirit longs for; but you dare not steadily gaze on what the hour has brought with it; you cannot school yourself to contemplate what the drinking of the cup may mean. You know not what to pray for, for you know not what you would. *"Not as I will, but as thou wilt,"* this is the resolve rising up in the heart; but the flesh is weak, and the prayer dies on your lips. It is too painful to be uttered, too hard to be thought; the longing to submit can only show itself in *"groanings that cannot be uttered."*

Or it may be that desire is in conflict with the wiser expectation of faith. We may have very definite desires, and yet not know what to pray for *"as we ought."* A mother may be distracted between her longing to shield her son from public shame and punishment, and her belief that such would be a wholesome discipline for him. We may be asking for the removal of a chastisement from a family or a nation; and yet so strong is our conviction of the righteousness and wisdom of God that we dare not ask its removal with absolute and importunate supplication. There are times when, if feeling alone prompted our prayers, we would cry and plead and wrestle with God with strong prevailing earnestness; but our heart is divided, knowing our ignorance we fear that the answer to our petitions may be more a curse than a blessing. *"Oh, let not the Lord be angry,"* we plead, as Abraham for Sodom. With Moses we say, *"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—"* *"Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments."* We know not how to pray; desire is strong, but faith in the unknown will of God is stronger.

Our words are hushed, our heart is burdened, our spirit confused; we can but bow and trust "*with groanings that cannot be uttered.*"

I have said enough in illustration of the fact in Christian experience to which our text alludes; let me now call your attention to the doctrine which the text unfolds. Paul here declares that these unutterable desires, these longings too deep for words or even for thought, are inspired within us by the Holy Ghost; that this inward working of the Spirit of God is a helping of our infirmities and an intercession for us; and that such mute prayers are really understood by God though we ourselves understand them but faintly, or understand them not at all. "*The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*"

I. We have here the reality of such prayer confirmed. There may be some present inclined to treat all that I have said as mere vague transcendentalism, a mystic dreaming; who, looking on the Gospel with cold intellectual eyes, regarding it merely as a system of religious truth to be reduced to formal propositions, and of precepts intended for the regulation of behaviour, are inclined to condemn all declarations that the faith of Jesus is a power of divine life, a source of spiritual emotion, and to censure the serious contemplation of facts that cannot be rigidly comprehended. Such may say, that instead of

treating these movements of the soul as divine, I ought rather to have denounced them as the sentimental fancies of a diseased spiritualism. Now, I might remind you that in ordinary life, feeling is often truer, as well as deeper, than thought, and that our profoundest, most powerful feelings cannot be uttered. Friends may find an intense joy in each other's society without a word being spoken: the members of a united family often yearn over one another with inexpressible love and longing. The aspirations of an ardent heart, the desires of a youth for distinction and service, often go vaguely, blindly out; but we expect far more from such an eager youth, only half-conscious of his purposes, than from one who can most clearly tell us all that is in his heart. But I content myself with saying that this is part of the Christian revelation; Paul is declaring what he knew by inspiration of God. Paul was a man of truth and soberness, free from superstition and fanatical weakness. He knew of what he was speaking, and he was sure that the Romans would know it too. It was for no inner circle of enthusiasts he was writing here, but for "*all that were in Rome, called to be saints.*" The church in the metropolis, the busy active society of Rome, is bidden mark the care God takes to help the infirmities, and educate the spirit, of his children. Those prayers of yours, he is saying, are oftentimes the truest and devoutest in which you can say nothing. Feeling and desire, in these, as well as in thought and purpose, God can recognize the spirit of the worshipper.

II. The Divine origin of these unutterable longings is here confirmed. As there are some who, never having known feelings too deep for words, would treat an

unspoken and unspeakable prayer with scorn ; so there may be others here, who, being conscious of such desires, seek to suppress them as the offspring of a diseased fancy, to frown them down as the dangerous manifestations of superstition and fanaticism. My brethren, consider the solemn blessedness of these words, "*the Spirit helpeth our infirmities.*" Perhaps we never feel our infirmity more than when in prayer. We cannot apprehend what prayer is ; we cannot reflect that we are in actual communion with God, that He is listening to what we say, noticing for what we ask, prepared to give us what we ask ; we cannot reflect that the gift might be to us loss, ruin, woe, that it will be to us, if we ask aright, infinite joy, eternal blessedness, wisdom and energy enduring and increasing age after age ; we cannot reflect that God also takes note of the defects of our supplication ; that He marks our carelessness in request, our poverty of desire, without feeling that in prayer we hold tremendous issues in our hands. Such a thought would confound us as we approached the throne of grace, and our only words would be, "*We know not what to pray for as we ought.*" Such a thought would check prayer altogether had we not the assurance of being helped to pray. For reality in prayer we need not only the assurance of a higher wisdom to which our petitions are offered, a fidelity that can withhold as well as grant, and an affectionate sympathy that can read the spirit rather than the letter of our requests ; for reality in prayer we need also that our spirits be brought into fellowship with God's Spirit, that our wills be made accordant with His. The careless thought, 'I can pray as I like, for God will not regard the faults of my requests in

His response; I can ask for what I most desire because He is sure to give only what is good;’ the feeling that, after all, the issue of prayer rests with Him rather than with us, is fatal to prayer. We must be enabled to pray aright, if we are to continue to pray at all.

We often pray fluently, because we pray thoughtlessly; we do not reflect that we are really asking, and that God is really listening. When we do apprehend this, we shall be very thankful that in our prayers, One wiser and truer than we is interceding for us; that the Holy Spirit is moving in our spirits, prompting true supplications, checking unhallowed and wayward wishes, causing the words we in our folly would utter to die upon our lips, awakening deeper longings, suggesting desires “*according to the will of God,*” stirring up the deepest energies of the heart into “*groanings that cannot be uttered.*” As children of God, His sons indeed but children still, ignorant, perverse, self-willed, we cannot give up the blessed truth that His Spirit is with us. Knowing the awful realities of life, the eternal issues towards which we are moving, we cannot give up the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, Comforter, Teacher, our guide in life, the author of a life divine, the giver of spiritual energy, checking, controlling, stimulating us in all the ways of God. And surely, in the solemn hour of prayer, on which our life of activity so much depends; when, as we ask we receive, and if we ask not we receive not; in the solemn hour of prayer that leaves us refreshed and strengthened, or wearied and yet more perplexed; in the solemn hour of prayer when we are desiring from God what shall be the bane or blessing of many days, we cannot dispense with His intercession. We bless God

for His Spirit, for His assurance of our pardon, and His sanctifying energy; for the Spirit of adoption, and the faith which He inspires; but not less than for these bestowments do we bless God that His Spirit "*helps our infirmities*" in prayer, that we come not alone before the throne of grace, but that "*the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*"

III. God understands the meaning of these longings that are not fully understood by the subject of them. Often what to cold bystanders seem merely odd antics, the wayward tricks of a child, to the sympathising father are full of deep and beautiful significance. The boisterousness of a boy just back from school, which a stranger might wish to suppress, the parent sees to be the expression of a gladness in his home too full to be kept down. In the moody restlessness of a girl, who sees her parents burdened by an anxiety she cannot understand, they recognize a desire to share the burden. The blundering efforts of a child in a busy household, which often only increase confusion, are more than mere blunders; they show that the little one desires to help, and the loving wish is gratefully perceived by the parental spirit. So does our heavenly Father search our hearts. In the heavy moanings of the spirit, that even after the assurance of forgiveness, and the hope of sanctification, is dissatisfied with itself, He sees the longing to be "*delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God.*" In the unutterable cry for God he reads a desire for communion with Him fuller than has yet been satisfied. In the struggle of the soul that knows not "*what to pray for as we ought,*" in the shaking sobs of him who is torn by distracting feelings

between personal wishes and the feeling that there may be something higher and nobler far than these, He recognizes the spirit striving to conquer the weakness of the flesh, the passion for submission, however hard it may be to submit.

Our text, moreover, speaks of "*the mind,*" or intent "*of the Spirit.*" There is a purpose in these apparently purposeless "groanings," an end after which this dim feeling is groping. God sees a meaning in that which to us has as yet no meaning. He sees the petitions to which the Spirit is prompting, although to us as yet they have not taken the form of petitions, but are only mute unutterable longings. Let us not say there is no reality in feelings too deep for us to set out in language; they are to God full of reality; these are the prayers which are surest of response. "*He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*"

Thus does God teach us to pray; thus does He lead us on to higher spiritual blessedness than any we yet have known. God prepares us to receive by awakening our desire. The longing which is to-day mute, blind, groping its way after what it knows not, to-morrow shall be a definite object of our consciousness; we shall know as we yield ourselves to the promptings of the Spirit for what He is leading us to ask, and shall be able to clothe our want in words. It is thus God works in all the course of His discipline of human souls. This is the order of all real human experience; first feeling, then thought, and language last of all. The depth of the spirit is first stirred, afterwards He reveals to our

understanding, and bestows on us that for which He has prepared us.

"*He that searcheth the hearts;*" these are solemn words. He pierces through our formalism, our flippancy, our fluency, and reads the cold and careless heart. He sees that under the words we often utter there is nothing; that the very prayer that excites in the prayer-meeting admiration of the "gift," or moves to self-complacency, is a hollow mockery. But He also sees the truth of much prayer that is a distress and burden to the suppliant. He sees the reality of desires that cannot be expressed. He sees our "*infirmities,*" and He "*helps*" them; He knows our ignorance of "*what to pray for as we ought,*" and He has sent His Spirit to "*make intercession for us according to the will of God.*" "*We are saved by hope,*" and the hope that is unseen shall become a fulfilled reality. Our "*earnest expectation,*" unutterable, unintelligible even to ourselves, "*waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*"



XVI.

CHRISTIAN MUTUAL TOLERANCE.

LUKE v. 33—39.

And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

THERE is great fulness of suggestion in the parables of verses 36 and 37. Christ is not only contrasting strength with weakness; He is also contrasting the worn-out with the immature. The new garment is an unworn garment. No man cutteth a piece out of a new coat to mend an old one; if he do so, he "*both rendeth the new*" garment, which is thus spoilt, and "*the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not*

with the old:" it is but a patch after all, not only unseemly but useless; the first strain on the mended garment will tear the patch from the old edges to which it is joined. In the passages in Matthew and Mark, parallel to our text, the cloth of which Christ speaks is cloth that has just left the loom, and is yet unfilled, unshrunk. "*No man putteth*" such cloth "*unto an old garment:*" the strained warp will contract by wear and damp; as it shrinks, it "*taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.*"

Similarly, the new wine is wine that has not fully fermented. It is put into a "*new bottle,*" a fresh sheep or goat-skin; then, as the wine in fermentation swells, the skin stretches with it. The wine itself exerts on the skin an influence analogous to that of tannin; it hardens the skin, deprives it of elasticity. If new wine were put into an old bottle, the already over-strained and inelastic leather would not yield to the fermenting liquor, the bottle would break, and the wine would perish. "*But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.*"

Christ is thus suggesting, not only that the spiritual life of His disciples is freer and stronger than that of the Pharisees and of John's disciples, He is also suggesting that it is as yet immature. He does imply that faith in Him is superior to the faith sustained by Jewish formalism and John's preaching of repentance. He speaks of His disciples as "*children of the bridechamber,*" having with them "*the bridegroom,*" of whom John was only the herald and forerunner. He speaks of the Jewish ceremonial as a worn-out garment, torn, and in need of patching. He compares it to an old and worth-

less skin, unfit to contain and unable to confine the free spirit of the gospel. He prophesies in these parables, what Paul afterwards distinctly taught, that Christian faith was far too vigorous to agree with the exclusiveness and slavery of Judaism; that any attempt to blend the two systems would end in the destruction of both. But He also recognizes the youth and inexperience of His own disciples. They would find reasons for sorrow in the after stages of their Christian life; it was not to be all a festal season with them. They would have to put themselves under discipline; the full flow of their gladness and liberty would give way to seasons of depression and spiritual barrenness, when they would have to use culture and watchfulness, sorrowfully to train themselves in the Christian life. Christian discipleship will have its forms and services, not all of which shall merely express the fulness of spiritual life, some of which will have to be used for the sustenance and recovery of spiritual vigour. But, meanwhile, now that they are enjoying light and liberty, let them shew it. It would be folly, insincerity for them to fast and make supplications, to wear the weeds of mourning when they are glad in the bridegroom's presence. And afterwards their spiritual life will mould its own forms: the sadness of the Christian disciple will reveal itself in sterner discipline than any that Jewish fasting and prayer-making can express. Their sorrow will be intense, their efforts after recovery earnest, in proportion to the gladness they have lost, to the stronger vitality of the Christian life.

The whole passage illustrates the breadth and tolerance of our Lord's teaching. We should, perhaps, have said to the Pharisees, "Christ's disciples have a higher

truth than you. They are not, like you, waiting for the consolation of Israel; they have the bridegroom with them. If you would only learn what they have learnt, you would eat and drink and be glad with them: it is your folly, your sin that you inflict on yourselves such pains and appear so mournful." This might have been true, but it would not have been all the truth. Christ foresees that His disciples will not always be so bright and joyous as now. Sobering influences will come upon them; "*the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.*" There will be, alas, no need for any to "*make them fast.*" They will have no heart for eating and drinking.

Christ is claiming for His disciples that their spiritual life be left to unfold itself naturally, that they be not fettered by forms, that they be not judged by religious traditions and old habits, that they be free to shew themselves glad when they have cause of gladness, and that their expressions of sorrow and their self-discipline follow their feeling of sorrow and their need of discipline.

He adds also a plea for the sincere among the Pharisees and John's disciples; He tells His own followers that they must be tolerant of these. No man accustomed to old wine can readily relish new. The old wine has formed his taste; his palate has grown accustomed to it. If you offer him a better wine that is new, he will say, "No, the old wine is the wine for me." Be not surprised if you cannot at once bring men long used to the formalism and gloom of a decaying Judaism into sympathy with your free and joyous discipleship. Their

habits of thought and feeling are formed, and it is hard to break them off. Proclaim as fully as you can that the bridegroom is come, be as cheerful, as free and unconstrained in your gladness as you will; but do not wonder if many are not easily drawn into fellowship with you. Their old depression will not at once quit them; the Pharisees have come to love the fastings and long prayers received by tradition from the fathers; the disciples of John have come to love the style of the desert, they revere the rough garb and simple hardiness of their master. Bear with them while you proclaim to them the good news of the kingdom; nor be angry, nor disappointed if some of the old rigidity and depression should attach even to such of them as accept the Gospel.

Because Christ's teaching is so broad, it is fit for all times. Had He simply affirmed the superiority of the gospel to Judaism, His words would only have illustrated the "*vanishing away*" of that which "*decayeth and waxeth old.*" But these parables have a perpetual application. They affirm the propriety of all forms of religious life that are the true outcome of spiritual experience, and they plead for consideration of one another in the differences which perpetually arise between Christians of varying experience and habitude.

I. Christ's vindication of freedom to all His disciples. Let me illustrate this topic by some references to the life of our own churches.

Here is a case which actually occurred in a congregation known to me. A young person had been from infancy accustomed to listen to a preaching of terrorism. The wrath of God, the fear of hell, and the danger of damnation were the facts most carefully and constantly

brought before her. So deep was the impression made upon her that her whole life was under gloom; she feared to close her eyes at night, and her first thought on awaking was that of a dreadful fate only postponed, but not yet escaped. God was the terror of her days; she could think of nothing else and of Him only with dismay. In time, she came under the influence of a minister whose joy it was to preach the good news of the kingdom of heaven. "*God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,*" "*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God*"—here was a new revelation to her. The doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God, that "*the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" was her God and Father, opened her eyes on a new world, and she was filled "*with all joy and peace in believing.*" She desired at once to take her place among the disciples of Christ, and asked admission to the church. With great joy, her pastor proposed her for fellowship, and in accordance with a custom now happily antiquated and vanishing away, two members of the church were appointed to visit her. They were good Christian people, but, although disciples of some years' standing, they had not yet attained to her freedom and joy in Christ. They were among those "children of the King" who "go mourning all their days;" "*without*" them "*were fightings and within were fears.*" Their highest conception of the Christian life was of constant, arduous struggle, with the hope of heaven for their consolation at the end. They needed just her simplicity of trust; for want of it they were quite unable to sympathise with her. They were scandalised at her tone of confidence and joy; they reported her as 'wanting in

humility, not sober-minded, lacking the diffidence of a true disciple of Jesus.' Her pastor was, however, wiser than they; he told them a little of her previous history, pointed out to them that it was not self-confidence, but confidence in Christ, that made her so ready for the endurance and self-consecration of a Christian life, that it was because she had the bridegroom with her that she could not fast. Now, surely, it was most unwise to test her Christian character in all its freshness and strength by their sadder, more sober experience. The new wine of her love would have burst the bottles of their religious habitude. Christian men ought to have been persuaded that the Lord Himself would mould her life into a form adapted for preserving her zeal and devotedness, so that not only should she find continual joy and energy in the gospel, but be also a minister and messenger of faith and hope to souls ready to perish.

The confident hopefulness of young converts often confounds an older Christian. He is inclined to speak somewhat thus:—"Either they are wrong or I am wrong. I find it a hard thing to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. I have sometimes to mourn an absent Lord, I feel my zeal waxing cold, and my first love is at times forgotten; my prayers have to be full of confession and of penitence; without constant vigilance I should decline and fall away. But as for these young people, it seems as though they were always in the heyday of spiritual joy. The hymns they choose at prayer-meetings are all of triumph, ascriptions in which an angel might join; the prayers they offer at family-worship are not sober, earnest petitions as of those who know that through much tribulation

they must enter the kingdom. Nay! I doubt if they pray enough; they seem to think that work is all. They are ever active; theirs is not a life of much meditation and solitude. I fear that these who put on their armour are boasting as though they were putting it off."

One of the principal reasons which an older Christian will assign for distrusting the young converts is, generally, their want of recognition of the Scripture doctrine of the Holy Ghost. "They speak," he will say, "of their faith and love, quite ignorant that their faith and love need constantly to be cherished by the inspirations of God's Spirit. They talk of the power of truth, not knowing that the heart of man is hardened against the truth, and cannot receive it until the discernment of the Holy Ghost is given. They think too much of Paul who plants and Apollos who waters, too little of God who giveth the increase. I have often to wait sadly upon God; we fast and make prayers, but these eat and drink."

Wait, wait, my brethren; this is Christ's lesson to us. Be not impatient, although their religious experience is not a precise copy of yours. The unfulled cloth will shrink in time; the fermenting wine will clear and mellow with age. Your way would be to force on them the sadness and anxiety which are quite natural to you, but would not be natural to them. You would make them fast by rule, and pray much, because that is the proper thing for a Christian to do. This would only make hypocrites of them. God's way is to let life sober them. At present, the bridegroom is with them. The gospel has come on them as a new revelation; they

have learnt the glory of the truth as it is in Jesus. They hold the doctrine of the Holy Ghost as dear as you, only they see it in its positive, you in its negative, aspect. Their motto is, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me;*" yours, "*Without me ye can do nothing.*" Hereafter, as they find themselves worsted in the fight, and feel their faith dying in them, they will see other meanings in the gospel. As they learn distrust of themselves, distrust of former attainments, distrust even of their own faith; they will cry to God, and He will reveal to them, as you cannot, how blessed is the faith of a Spirit to succour them in their infirmities,—strong when they are weak, true when they are faithless,—the same good, gracious Helper and Comforter amid their changes. All this will fall into their Christian experience as it has fallen into yours. Meantime, while you exhort or even admonish them, do not judge them harshly. Do not measure their doings by your experience; do not try to confine an immature fermenting wine in an old skin.

My brethren, we cannot antedate maturity, nor hurry experience. Endeavour not to force a young and vigorous, even though incomplete, Christian character into the mould and habit of an older one, which may perchance, in its turn, be too despondent, too cheerless; but rather notice, and admire, how God develops each according to its own vitality, and appoints to each its proper sphere and mode of service.

Once more. Richard Baxter is the author of these well-known and often quoted lines :

" I preach, as never sure to preach again,
And as a dying man to dying men."

They are an exact description of his natural, spontaneous feeling. He had not to force himself to feel thus ; nor is he here alluding to the general uncertainty of life. From his boyhood he was of weak and sickly frame, and constantly oppressed with pain and nervous debility. His life was more than once imperilled in the pulpit. At one time a terrific storm of thunder and lightning broke over his chapel while he was preaching, and he had to allay the terrors of the congregation. At another, part of his chapel fell during his service, and many were injured. Once, when preaching in a private house, he was shot at, the bullet coming through the window and passing by his head. Moreover, during some years of his life, the officers of justice were on the look-out for him, because of his Nonconformity; and he feared that he might be led from the pulpit to the damp, unwholesome prison that would have been so dangerous to his enfeebled constitution.

It was no constrained language, this couplet of his, but a bare and simple fact. There are many men who have the same feeling that death can never be far from them ; men of infirm health, old men whose "*sun, and moon, and stars, are darkened,*" the "*keepers*" of whose "*house tremble,*" and "*the strong men bow themselves,*" and "*those that look out of the windows are darkened,*" who "*rise up at the voice of the bird,*" and "*are afraid of that which is high,*" to whom "*the grasshopper is a burden,*" and with whom "*desire*" has "*failed.*" Some there are too who have had a wearisome life, and who welcome the constantly expected approach of death. Such men always feel as dying men ; in the pulpit or in the market, with their children, in friendly chat, they think of the

“*silver cord*” being “*loosed*,” and the “*golden bowl broken*,” of the “*pitcher*” being “*broken at the fountain*,” and the “*wheel broken at the cistern*.”

But here is a young man full of health and vigour ; his rate of insurance is calculated on the probability of his living thirty, forty, or fifty years. He is radiant and buoyant ; God has put in him the hopefulness and spring which come of a robust frame and sound lungs. He is, while working for to-day, also fitting himself for prolonged service. He believes that he will see many days, and speaks and acts under such a conviction. While older men dwell much on the kingdom in the heavens, he thinks more of the coming of God’s kingdom upon earth. While older men are saying that “*the time is short*,” and utter the warning “*it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ;*” the chorus of his life is “*whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men*.”

Now, why should not such a one say—

“ I preach, as hoping oft to preach again,
And as a living man to living men ? ”

Why should older, death-expecting persons force his fresh vitality and conscious vigour as new wine into an old bottle ? My brethren, if death has truths to reveal to us, so has life. Some things are better seen by one on the verge of the grave, others by him who is strong in the hope of long life. The one sees that “*the world passeth away*,” the other “*desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good*.” There are some facts of life which only the sound and vigorous can appreciate ;

there are other facts best apprehended by the dying. There is a work to be done by the young, and God has given them the impulses for it. If you try to school them into the mode of feeling which is natural, and therefore true, to the invalided or the aged, you will ruin them. You will destroy the freshness of feeling by which God is fitting them for their special service; and you cannot give them the earnestness and tone of those near death. It will never be to them more than a lesson they have learnt; their words will have no power. Their native energy will be always breaking through their conventionalities; the "*new wine*" will "*burst the old bottles,*" and the wine will "*be spilled, and the bottles perish.*" Put the "*new wine*" into "*new bottles,*" and both will be "*preserved.*"

II. Christ's plea for consideration of one another. 'Be patient,' Christ is saying to those who were offended at the exuberance of His disciples; 'they will not always be as joyous as they are now.' The self-forgetfulness of v. 35 is very touching, "*the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them.*" It is of the cross Christ is here speaking. Yet there is no word of His conflict and suffering; He only says that "*then they will fast in those days.*"

The realities of life, and the variations of Christian experience will surely take away from younger disciples the undue exultation which shocks the elder saints. Without your schooling, they will pass through their "*much tribulation.*" They will be sober enough, subdued enough by-and-by. A joyous experience is not the only true experience of the godly; sorrow is needed to ripen and mellow the character. The raw cloth will be

stronger and warmer when it has shrunk. The new wine will cast down its crudities and mellow into fitness for the Master's table. To the joy of love will be added the sorrow and the sacrifice of love. The impetuositities of faith will be tamed. But a few years, the Father will have disciplined the young people you now censure; you will see them mature and earnest men of God. The cares of life; the bitterness of separation following on the gladness of friendship; the anxieties of brotherly and sisterly affection; the wrestling for dear ones alienated from Christ, a wrestling oftentimes in vain; the sight of an ungodly world; temptation and failure; their own poverty of devotedness and declension in piety—all these are coming. They will fast and pray in those days.

Only God must develop their life as seems good to Him; we must not try to force them into an unreal experience. What insincerity we may thus foster! When you hear a child repeating a verse of David's penitential Psalm, "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me:*" or those lines—

" Can such a wretch as I
Escape this cursed end ? "

does not the question occur to you, ' Can that child possibly know what it is saying? is not the strain on the child's conscience too great in the effort to grasp the truth of such words? is not the fact that the child cannot possibly be real in these utterances exerting a fatal influence upon it, so that it will regard all Christian language as forced and unnatural? ' God only can awaken self-loathing; actual life alone, the experience of self alone, can make us feel what inward pollution is. Insincerity is the rending of the cloth, the bursting of the bottle.

Truthfulness and all capacity for religion are thus destroyed ; they can only "*hold the truth in unrighteousness*" who are victims of such hypocritical straining.

Consider, too, that all the joyful energy of Christian love and faith is needed to carry us on through the discipline of facts and of self-knowledge. We should rather look with deepest sympathy on even an excessive confidence in a young convert, assured as we are that all his hope will be required by him in his Christian life ; just as we look on little children playing in their happy thoughtlessness, and think how time will sober them. God has given them these glad impulses to prepare them for the days in which they too shall say, "*I have no pleasure in them.*" The experience of a faithful follower of Christ is sobering enough. Do not force him into unnatural gloom ; or, as his gladness goes, his strength may also fail him in the day of trial.

There is another illustration of this truth. The fasting and much prayer of the Jews were a discipline. The disciples have not the bridegroom always with them ; not always is fervour spontaneous or zeal full. There are times in the Christian life when the inspirations of heaven seem to be wanting ; when purpose and effort, rather than impulse, mark our piety. Self-discipline is then appropriate ; when spiritual life is feeble, it is essential. Sometimes we worship God, because we can do no other ; the "*light of his countenance*" is lifted upon us, and we must lift up our hearts in adoration. At other times we have to entreat, "*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.*" We have lost our sense of God's favour, "*forgotten our first love.*" The bridegroom stood at the door and knocked, but we would not hear

His voice, and now He is gone from us. This is the experience which makes young Christians understand and value the fasting and prayers, the humility and self-distrust, the sobriety and watchfulness of maturer saints. You could not force them to vigilance and sobriety and self-discipline; but they have come to find these things necessary to them. The cloth is shrinking, wear and tear are proving its strength. The wine is fermenting, clearing itself, casting down its impurities. This is the time which tests the difference between sincerity and insincerity; between modes copied from others and the deep realities of personal experience. At such a time nothing will sustain us but a faith that is to its very heart's centre whole and sound. God's discipline of us, not human formalities, will be our preservation.

It was in vindication of His disciples that Christ spoke the former verses of our text; yet they involve an appeal to them on behalf of their sombre critics. Their own time of fasting, when it came, would interpret to them the fasting and much supplication of the disciples of the Pharisees and the Baptist. Their own season of waiting and weariness, while Christ was in the tomb, would make them feel that a pious Jew could not but be sad until he came into the presence of the bridegroom. They would be very tender towards the gloom of the temple and the desert. To be without Christ was to be very sorrowful. Judaism was a worn-out garment, but it had been a true garment in its day. Its fastings and its prayer-making had been the only fit religious habit of a people waiting for their Redeemer, not yet rejoicing in His presence.

When the more sombre Christians attempt to bind

their sadness as a law on the whole Church, there will surely be strife and bitterness, insincerity, unfitness for the stress of the Christian conflict. But the life which Christ develops in its own fitting forms will give the joyful confident Christian, matured by painful discipline, sympathy even with those whose sadness is the sadness of doubt. He will be very gentle with them; for his own life has taught him that without full and abiding confidence in Jesus, religious experience must be a gloomy thing.

And Christ goes on to inculcate thoughtful sympathising forbearance with those who are not so cheery, so hopeful, as the children of the bridechamber should be. He tells His disciples not to wonder if the Jews should still insist on their fastings and their forms, and the disciples of John still love the desert, the hard fare and rugged speech. They are used to the taste of the old wine. It is a hard thing to cast off the habits and traditions of a life.

The new wine is better than the old. Not only is Christianity better than Judaism; even under the gospel the new days are better than the old. God gives His best blessings latest; "*thou hast kept the good wine till now.*" The matured disciple, who has been cleared from his excesses, and is rejoicing in a second and calmer gladness, will not be harsh towards those who think it a Christian duty to be gloomy. We meet with some such even now; men who see no signs that the gospel is advancing and the world improving; who are more keen to discover the tokens of men's wickedness than the tokens of God's grace; men who count all joy to be sinful, and will not take the hope and stimulus of which

the gospel and the times are full. Let us be gentle towards them. Perhaps they were nursed and grew up under depressing influences. We are full of confidence; never was there a brighter hope in the Christian Church than there is to-day. We labour in all gladness, confident that the second advent has long begun, and that Christ is with His people. We speak to some persons of these things, call on them to rejoice in the Lord. But, no ! they cannot shake off the depression and gloom which have characterized their whole spiritual history. Well, let us be tender and forbearing. Let us not worry and vex them. It is their habit to be gloomy; the "forms of the cave" haunt them still. Undepressed by their gloom, let us keep our hopefulness; let us also be kindly towards them, let our Christian gladness take the form of Christian charity. Let us not be disappointed, though some should still choose to fast with the Baptist rather than to eat and drink with Christ; knowing that no man used to old wine desireth new, but says "the old wine is the wine for me."



XVII.

CHRISTIAN COURTESY.

LUKE x. 5, 6.

*And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.
And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not,
it shall turn to you again.*

CHRISTIAN courtesy, its breadth, its depth, its foundation, and its blessedness:—this is the subject which I purpose illustrating by our text.

I. The breadth of Christian courtesy. The kindly greeting, “*Peace be to this house,*” was to be addressed to every family into which the seventy might enter. Christ “*sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.*” He sent them out among men, many of whom would be indifferent or hostile to them and their message. “*Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves;*” these are the words in which He prepares them for the treatment they may have to endure at men’s hands. Yet He bids them, “*into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.*” These were to be their first words, spoken before they knew whether they were among friends or foes, whether they would be welcomed

or dismissed. Christ sends them out with a spirit full of peace and kindness, with a confiding, loving heart ; they were to be gracious and frank to all men.

II. The depth of Christian courtesy, the reality and meaning of their greeting, are brought before us in verse 6. Christ is telling them that their words are not to be a mere formal salutation ; He suggests that an influence of peace shall actually go out from them, to "*rest upon*" the house that receives them ; returning to them if rejected.

The words, "*Peace be to you,*" were and still are the common Eastern salutation. In the lips of most men they were a mere form, but Christ is treating them as a reality ; how would the disciples be startled to find that Christ looks upon this greeting as being a prayer, and speaks of peace resting on those whom they saluted or returning to them again ! Perhaps we shall better apprehend this by putting Christ's language into an English form. Conceive of Christ as saying to us, 'When you meet an acquaintance, or enter into conversation with any one, first say, Good day to you. And if the spirit of goodness be with him, your blessing shall rest upon him ; if not, it shall return to you again.' How that would make us think upon our words, reprove us for our thoughtless use of them ! Christ is treating my "Good day" as a prayer ; and so indeed it is. Its full form is, I wish that this day may be a good day to you ; I pray that it may be so. And yet, I have not thought that there was any such meaning in it. I use the words continually ; but I do not use them thus. I do not really think that the day will be better to my neighbour because I have spoken

thus. But Christ is implying this. Christ looks upon the reality of my words ; He is saying that these words go not only into my friend's ear, but also up to the ear of God ; that the God of peace and goodness is ready to listen to these kindly invocations we utter for one another. The peace, the blessedness comes in answer to our words ; to rest upon the man who has the spirit of peace and goodness with him, to return in blessings upon him who uses the greeting.

The soul of Christian courtesy is faith ; our greetings are prayers. Trust in God is the animating principle of social kindness ; graciousness of disposition rests upon the grace of God. Almost all our kindly words, when we meet and part from one another, are in their original form supplications to God for one another. Our 'good-bye' is a contraction of 'God be with thee ;' when we say 'farewell,' we are asking that our friends may fare well ; 'adieu' is just a commendation of one another to God : so wide spread is the impulse to commend a friend to God as the dearest act of friendship. So true is this, that because the common forms of greeting have lost for us the stamp of prayer, a deep affection casts them aside and uses a form in which the prayer shall be at once evident. When friends go for a long season away from one another ; when husband quits wife, and father child ; when brothers and sisters are parting, they discard the ordinary farewell and say, "God bless you." The common words, that once were prayers, but through long usage have ceased to seem so to us, are too cold, too empty. Kind words are not enough, we solemnly commit each other to God's keeping. Christ is telling us here that every greeting should

be a prayer ; God expects this, and God will answer the prayer. How deep and solemn kindness of feeling is thus seen to be ! Christ bases it upon the common love, the common peace of God.

All this may seem to make Christ's words in verse 5 very difficult. Because our greetings mean so much, how can we use them in "*whatsoever house we enter ?*" How can I say, "*Peace be to you,*" when I believe that the God of peace is not with the man ? How can I bid him be blessed on whom I think the curse of God is abiding ? This hesitation is connected with a deeper difficulty, the whole relation of the church to the world. "*We know,*" says John, "*that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*" How can Christians be frank and cheerful and genial in their intercourse with the world ? How can we be cordial and open-hearted with any but the church ? In a lost world there seems nothing for us to be sombre. The dreadful fate of the ungodly, the bitterness that the Bible reveals as the lot of the wicked ; this takes away all our cheerfulness. Unless we know that those we are mixing with are saved from this, frankness and cordiality are impossible. If we might think as the world, and feel like the world, when we mix with the world, and keep our deep Christian sentiments for our fellow-members of the church, then we might be ever courteous. If we could forget all about the soul and the gospel, about salvation and damnation, and speak to the ungodly just as they speak to themselves, we might be as frank and cheerful with them as they are with one another. But we cannot do this. Christ's words do not allow us. We see that deep Christian feeling is the basis of all

our friendliness ; and deep Christian feeling appears to forbid our saying "*first, in whatsoever house we enter, Peace be to this house ;*" we can only say it when we are sure that we are in a Christian household.

Now, my brethren, we may be quite sure that if in anything our thought differs from Christ's, Christ is right and we are wrong. Here we find that Christ is hopeful where we are distrustful. Christ taught his disciples to be confident that the gospel would win its way to men's hearts, and only to leave them when they had proved them to be unbelieving ; we choose rather to be suspicious of men until we have actually seen that they believe. Christ knew that the seventy would be rejected of many, and their message despised ; "*he knew what was in man.*" Yet He said, "*into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.*" He taught His disciples rather to expect that those to whom they spoke would receive, than that they would reject their words. They were first to speak as though Christ would be welcomed, only on finding him rejected were they to depart. But we take the other way ; we start with the notion that men will reject us for Christ's sake ; we examine them first, and only afterwards are we willing to trust them. A suspicious attitude of the church towards those who are not in its fellowship is not Christ's attitude ; He taught His disciples to believe that men would receive them, and only to leave them when they had found them hard of heart.

This difference between us and Christ rests on another and a deeper difference. Christ thought first of all, and most of all, about God's feeling to men ; we think rather of men's feeling to God. Christ thought first of all, and

most of all, of the power of the gospel to overcome the hard and rebellious human spirit ; we think rather of the power of men to resist the grace of God. He sent out His disciples to preach the kingdom of God, assuring them that they should find many prepared by the Son of peace to receive it. God had been making ready a people for His message ; it was the disciples' work to go and gather them in. On God's grace and God's preparation of men, Christ based their hopes. Have we not too much forgotten all this ? Have we not omitted to sink how good and powerful the gospel is, how deeply men need it, how wonderfully God has been fitting them to receive it ? Have we not been dwelling too much on the few signs that men love God ; too little on the blessed truth that God loves men ? If we take Christ's thought of His disciples' work ; if we dwell on Christ's hopefulness and confidence that we shall find men whom "*the Son of peace*" has been preparing for the gospel, and who will receive it when it is preached ; if by this we correct our doubts, our theological systems that often seem to express our doubts as fully as our faith ; we shall find it not only possible to be truly genial, heartily courteous, hopeful and loving to all ; we shall discover the true spirit of the gospel to be hopefulness and tenderness and cordiality, and a new and affectionate interest will animate all our intercourse with men.

III. These are the two foundations of genuine Christian courtesy ; (a) the sense of our Christian mission ; and (b) the certainty that we shall find many prepared for the Lord.

(a) Christ sent His disciples to "*heal the sick,*" to

"cast out devils," and to say to all "*the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.*" Could they doubt whether they would be received? Would not the sick man hail them from his couch? and the demoniac come trusting them to heal him? would not all the waiting sons of Israel rejoice in the message that they brought, and gladly listen to the tidings of the "*acceptable year of the Lord?*" Their confidence that they were come on a blessed errand, that it was given to them to comfort the sorrowful, to sustain the sinking, to still the restless, and to proclaim the blessed name of Christ would fill them with a confidence, a frankness, and a tenderness, that would secure them a welcome. With what words could they enter any house but those which Christ bade them first to speak? they were full of peace, they were charged and laden with peace; peace was the light of their eye, it was the spring of their footstep, it must have breathed in their every tone. It would come forth from them because it was so fully in them; the messengers of peace could say no other words, no words before these, in whatsoever house they entered, "Peace be to this house."

It is just this sense of a mission which Christ has entrusted to us, a holy, blessed message He has given us to utter which is needed to make us frank and courteous to all men. Selfishness is the root of all moroseness and ungeniality. We think that the great thing we have to do in this world is to get safely out of it, and that our security is endangered by our intercourse with men. We look upon men in general as our enemies; it is dangerous for Christians to have much to do with them, lest their impurity should defile us, and sympathy with them should drag us down to the level of their

ungodliness, and intercourse with them should prove to us a temptation and a snare. But let us hear ourselves bidden by Christ to take them all a blessed message ; let us feel ourselves called of God that we may make Him known to others ; let us recognise that our Christian experience is intended to fit us for entering into sympathy with others' sorrows and struggles ; let us rejoice in our confidence in Christ, because it fits us for telling others that He is their Saviour, their Redeemer, their Helper, and their Friend ; then will our ungodly cowardice, our unchristian gloom and distrust leave us ; then our intercourse with all men will be hearty and hopeful. Yonder is a dying man ; you can go and tell him that Christ hath "*destroyed him that hath the power of death, that is the devil ; that he might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*" Here is a restless soul troubled with vague apprehensions, dark forebodings, an unutterable load ever resting on him, he knows not the cause of his distresses, he is only aware of a deep dissatisfaction ; you can go to him and say, " My friend, I know your need. I read your secret, and I can tell you the way to peace. Christ is repeating his call, '*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*' " Here is a family of children ; you know that Christ has said, "*Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not ;*" you can speak to them of the gentle shepherd, "*who gathers the lambs with his arms and carries them in his bosom.*" There is a youth just going out into life ; you can appeal to him, "*Wilt thou not from this time say, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth ?*" To one, worn-out with many a conflict of life,

uneasy in the midst of his gold, sick of his past, despairing of his future, heartless, dissatisfied with himself, you can say, 'There are "*durable riches and righteousness*," "*they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength*;" it is Christ and His salvation for which your restless soul is craving, and He will fill you with peace.' If we recognized a work like this as our call in life, if we knew ourselves sent by Christ to say to all, "*the kingdom of God is come unto you*;" how hearty and how tender, how frank and hopeful, how loving and how sincere we should always be. The dark doubts that haunt us, "How can I speak cheerfully and hopefully in every house I enter; how can I bless all I mingle with, and bid them peace?" would be utterly at an end. The song of the angels would be upon our lips, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men*." Our hearts would determine our language. "*Peace*" is the word my Saviour has bid me say, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*."

Nor do I think a thoughtful Christian man ever will be genuinely courteous to all, until he recognizes that this is the call and mission of his life. Forgetfulness of the sinfulness and ruin of his neighbours will not avail him; he cannot forget. The doubts that torture him in many houses into which he enters will make him morose; with such a gloom at his heart, how can he speak kindly and peaceful words? But the hope of the gospel bearing him up, the call of Christ to him to speak His blessed name, and to bid men take that name upon their lips, and claim the plenitude of its graciousness, will

make him a loved and trusted friend. Peace will go with him into many a home, for Christ's spirit goes with him; wherever He is, He will say, with all His heart, "*Peace be unto you.*"

(b) The assurance that we shall find a people prepared for the Lord. With the words of John before us, that Christ was "*the true light which lighteth every man,*" I do not think we shall be wrong in understanding this "*son of peace*" to be the Lord Himself. Assuredly, now that Christ's Spirit has been given, and has been so long "*convicting the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment,*" we may be confident that we shall find many ready to listen to our words, and to accept joyfully, thankfully, the peace that Christ sends us out to utter. Some households would reject the disciples, but not all: the son of peace would be beforehand with them in many a house, their prayer should be answered, and their peace should rest upon it. Christ bids them enter every house with this assurance, to trust that they would be welcomed till they found themselves actually rejected. "*Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.*"

The disciples often saw when they were with Christ, how He was accepted by many of whom they would never have dared to hope this. Christ said to the woman of Samaria, of whom He knew so much more than they knew, "Give me to drink." How little could they have anticipated how near the son of peace was to that alien woman; if they had known about the five husbands and the sixth who was not her husband, how little would they have hoped from addressing her; how unable they would have been to have spoken genially

to her! Yet, she received the Saviour, and the whole city bade Him welcome. Zaccheus in the tree had "*the son of peace*" with him. Christ says, "*Come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house.*" This day, he adds, "*is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Israel.*" The time of penitence and faith was come for the publican; the covetous extortioner looses his hold of his gain. The Pharisee, Simon, could not be courteous to the woman which was a sinner. Possibly some of us, even with a heavy heart, wounded by her great transgression and hopeless for her, would have mourned over her as over one to whom we could not say, Peace be unto you. Yet Jesus said, "*Her sins, which are many, are all forgiven her, for she loved much.*" "*Go in peace,*" He bids her, "*thy sins are forgiven thee.*"

What confirmation of our faith have we in these and the many like incidents! How dare we refuse to hope that the "*son of peace*" is in any house, when we have found Him where we so little thought to see Him? Christ's Spirit striving, convicting, preparing men for the gospel; Christ standing at many a worldly, many a troubled heart and knocking there; Christ's grace working through household sadness, awakening dissatisfaction, kindling higher aspirations and larger hopes; here is our ground of confidence. "*The harvest truly is plenteous:*" the Lord has been ripening many a soul, and He bids us go and gather them in. It is because we have so little faith in God that we are so hopeless about men; it is the eternal Father's voice that bids us go to the help and consolation of our brethren, who also are His sons. Would

we but listen to His voice! Sometimes a tender affection rises up in us, a glow of hope kindles, and we speak in Christ's name to some one, wondering perhaps at our boldness that we should dare address him. And lo! the "*son of peace*" is there; it proves that our message is just that for which he has long been waiting, the very message he is prepared to hear. Why should this startle us? Is the love that moves us less than the Father's love? Have we more confidence in the gospel than Christ has? Are we more hopeful than the constantly working, patiently striving Spirit? Or rather, is it not God Himself who bids us hope, bids us speak tenderly, earnestly? Did we but claim as our own the mission and the power to proclaim the kingdom of God among men, we should be so marvellously blessed, as that never again should we dare to be despondent over one soul. "*The peace of God which passeth all understanding*" would possess us in all our intercourse with men. No one has the right to be so genial and so frank to men as the Christian has; no one has the fresh spring of cheerful, genuine, hopeful courtesy the Christian has. Who shall say "*Peace be unto you*;" who shall bid their friends a "Good-day," and say, "God bless you," "Farewell;" if not those whose faith is that Christ has called them to be His messengers of good to all souls, and is leading them ever into association with those whom He has prepared for their words?

We need to cast ourselves wholly on the truth that God is love; we need to dwell in God, and so dwell in love; and then how kind will be all our greetings, how hopeful, how blessed all our intercourse with men.

God loves them ; Christ has come to seek and to save them ; peace be upon them all. "*Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*" And "*charity never faileth. Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail ; whether there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*" Our gifts, our power of reasoning, our forcible way of putting the truth, may prove all useless. But the love that will not give men up because God has not given them up, that refuses to despond concerning any so long as God still calls Himself their Father, will keep us hopeful, keep us frank and gracious, and will make us welcome, make us messengers of peace and blessedness to many a soul.

IV. I have already anticipated somewhat I had designed to say under our fourth head—the blessedness of Christian courtesy. "*If the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it ;*" rest upon the household, and on you too while you are in it. The unforeseen welcome given you by many who return your cordial greeting ; the humility, the heartiness, the joy with which they listen to your words ; God's answer to the prayer of your greeting ; in all this, you and they will share together.

But look for a moment at the last clause of the verse, "*If not, your peace shall turn to you again.*" Christ tells His disciples that some will reject them ; not all our hope will be fulfilled. "If," you ask, "if my frank intercourse with the ungodly does not bless them, will it not injure me ? If all towards whom I am kind and gracious,

would certainly receive the Saviour, then I could be kind and gracious. But I fear lest I shall be depraved by too great frankness with worldly men, some of whom will continue worldly. Shall I not be charged with inconsistency? will not Christ's name be blasphemed by them if a Christian man shows no shrinking from them? Will not my hopefulness, moreover, be forfeited by my ill success? shall I not be unfitted for trusting that any will be won by finding my friendly association rejected?" To all these questions we have Christ's answer, "*your peace shall turn to you again.*" No man is ever degraded by his love for the ungodly. Christ's name is not dishonoured by the tender, gracious association of His people with the lost souls to whom He sends them. You know of whom it was said, "*this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*" You may be misjudged by your fellow-christians, but you will not be misjudged by your Lord. Let a church think of you what it will; your Master approves you. There is no such thing as a lost blessing; Christian kindness is never wasted. Scorned by men, cast out as a shame to you, made to you a scoffing and a reproach, it "*turns to you again.*" Nor will you fall into distrust; love may suffer, but Christ preserves it hopeful. You will learn wisdom by the rejection of your words; you will grow in patience; faith will learn more and more to separate itself from men and rise and rest in God. A deeper fellowship with Jesus will be yours; a fuller acquaintance with His love that never has grown weary yet, though it has been so oft rejected; the Comforter will still your trouble, and stay your trust. You will have a frankness and a cordiality that will be able to endure repulse; love, wounded by the sharp *pruning-hook*, shorn of many a beautiful branch, will root

itself deeper in the eternal purpose of the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. "*Your peace will turn to you again.*"

One word more, and I have done. Some may be ready to ask, "is not this making the Christian life too easy? this geniality and frankness, is it not something very like conformity to the world?" You think of Christ's words, and you ask, "Where is the taking up of the cross and following Christ? must we not "*deny ourselves,*" and be "*separate from the world,*" and "*come out from among*" men, that we may be the "*sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty?*" Ah! my brethren, I know of no cross-bearing so sharp, so earnest as this. It is an easy thing to shut yourself up from men; the monkish cell, a devotional self-seclusion, or seclusion within the church, is but a cowardly unfaithfulness to this severer duty. It is not conformity to the world of which I have been speaking, but deep yearning pity; not a shallow gaiety, but an earnest love. Your hearts will often sink within you; you will be distracted by a brother's shame when you really love your brother. To bear up against the sinking, to hope against hope, to conquer your gloom and be gentle, when your ease-loving heart suggests that the better way would be to have no more to do with sinners, is to feel the sharpness of the cross; and the very love, which alone can enable you to endure it, is the secret of your sensitiveness to all its shame and bitterness. That was Christ's cross, to love and yet to condemn, to condemn and yet to love; to bear the shame and sorrow because he could not cease to love. "*If any man serve me, let him follow me.*" "*The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.*"



XVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S COUNTRY.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 20, 21.

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

A FEW words of critical exposition will prepare us for the practical exhortation of our text. The word here rendered "*conversation*" has very much the same meaning as our word "*constitution*" in such phrases as "*the British constitution.*" The word "*citizenship*" frequently substituted for it by expositors may be accepted, if to the ordinary meaning of political standing and privilege, be added other conceptions; the mode of a nation's government, the character and principles of its laws, the tone and habit of its citizens. The word rendered "*is*" is a very forcible word. Paul is saying that our constitution *endures and rules* in heaven. It is well founded and abiding; neglected or contemned by many, unrecognized, unthought of, it is real. Its sway is over us; we are its subjects, under its protection, owing allegiance to it.

States have their heads, those to whom we look to assert authority and vindicate right. Our head is "*the Lord Jesus Christ,*" and we are awaiting Him from heaven. He will come to us as "*a Saviour;*" will deliver us from the wrongs we experience, the perils to which we are exposed, while He is in heaven and we are still on earth. We are enduring "*humiliation*" now, but we shall share "*his glory.*" "*He will change the body of our humiliation, and make it like unto the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*" We are "*looking for*" Him; we live in expectation of Him; we are patient until He comes from the heaven, which is our home; comes as our deliverer and Saviour.

There are here, you see, two practical motives by which the Apostle urges the Philippians to walk so as they have true Christian teachers for an ensample; the energy of loyalty, and the inspiration of hope. To these motives I would now call your attention.

I. The energy of loyalty. Loyalty is reverence for law; not mere submission to it, but the free, glad submission which comes from respect for the law and homage to the authority on which it rests. A man may be obedient to his country's laws for fear of punishment. Not out of any regard for right, but because of the constable and the jail, he may keep within the bounds of law. The loyal man will not think much of a penalty to be escaped; he honours the principle of law; because it is just and good, he will submit himself to it.

The privilege of his citizenship was the protection of every Roman. By pleading this, Paul himself escaped the lash. He appealed to the central authority of the

empire ; refusing to be judged according to the expediencies of a provincial ruler ; demanding to be tried, fairly and without prejudice, by the laws of the empire. But that would be a poor loyalty which only pleaded privilege, careless of the homage of submission. The loyal Roman citizen would behave himself as a freeman. Regard for others would be instilled into him by reverence for the law which protected all. He would be as careful of others' rights as of his own. The spirit of citizenship would make the true Roman ruler impartial ; he would not disgrace himself by extortion, or haste, or injustice. It would make every citizen careful of his own conduct, considerate of others' rights. They are not loyal Englishmen who, by their vices, have brought shame on the English name in many foreign lands ; by lust and drunkenness and arrogance leading semi-barbarians to believe that British rule is but the synonym for selfishness and tyranny. The man who respects himself as a freeman will respect other men ; the spirit of loyalty will regulate his conduct and form his character ; attachment to his country will lead him to live worthy of it.

You see how loyalty to heaven affected Paul. It was pain to him that there were Christians who were unmindful of their heavenly character. He speaks, "*even weeping,*" of some who were "*the enemies of the cross of Christ : whose end was destruction, whose god was their belly, whose glory was in their shame, who were mind-ing earthly things.*" They were dishonouring themselves, they were casting contempt upon their citizenship ; it was shame and deep sorrow to Paul that Christians should so live. To him the Christian name was something to be regarded with reverence, and preserved

spotless; the honour of the heavenly citizen is the strong motive by which he appeals to his loved disciples at Philippi.

Loyalty to a higher order is an energy to resist degrading circumstances or strong temptation. It is so when the influence is historic only or ideal. It is much for many a lad just entering on life in London with all its snares, that in his inexperience and freedom, he can recall the names of those who, by industry and patience, by readiness to learn and promptness to serve, have won to themselves positions of respect. The influence of a man like George Peabody will fire many with a sacred ambition to care for the homes and welfare of the poor. The memories of an ancient chivalry control men in the excesses of strength; give bent to their conscious powers; lead them to consideration for the helpless; and form in them courtesy, and gentleness, and courage. Patriotic pride may be an idle sentiment swelling the soul with triumph, it may expend itself in vague fancies and a useless flow of words. But it may exert a real influence upon character. Cherished in silence rather than wasted in applausive language, it is an impulse to sons to prove worthy of their sires; a name is theirs which they must not dishonour; to them it is committed to enlarge and to adorn a past history of self-conquest and nobility. And when respect for a pure and lofty order is not a dream of the fancy or a memory of the past, when it is attachment to what is known and loved and honoured; there is no influence so ennobling, none that so chastens motive and lends earnestness to life. The higher law of the household constrains many to purity of thought and strict integrity and manly struggle.

The memory of those at home, a dear friend who trusts him with all her heart, children who look up to him with implicit reverence, may surround a man with a hallowed atmosphere, check him in many an hour of temptation, deprive temptations often of all their force. The youths exposed to the seductions of a great city, where he may sin unobserved, is often preserved simply by the thought of home. He will not do what would grieve a parent's heart, or bring a blush upon a sister's cheek. He thinks not of the danger of discovery; enough for him that in his own heart there would be the consciousness of degradation. Never again could he return the frank look of love if he knew himself to have wronged the purity of home. The thought of the pious household he has left checks many a one in irreverent speech; the law of the Christian family is binding still upon him. He has left them, but yet he is one of them; his heart is with them, ties never to be broken bind him to them; he reveres the bond, and it preserves him. His loyalty to the sanctities of household piety is the energy of a pure and reverent life.

It is in this way, I think, that Paul is appealing to the Philippian Christians, when he says, "*we are citizens of heaven.*" He is putting them upon their honour. Around them are many who have fallen from their profession, who are living mean and degraded lives. The influence upon them of such men may be constant and powerful; they may be under many a temptation to give themselves up to "*earthly things.*" Avarice may allure them; they may be tempted to an ungodly emulation of the proud; the vain and empty may seek to draw them along in their train; they may be tempted to resentment and self-

seeking; but he reminds them that amidst all, they are citizens of heaven. At times, it may seem as though the Christian life were too high in its ideal, an impracticable life for men on earth. Self-denial is very hard; ease, pleasure, self-gratification have a strong charm. Why be thus ever self denying? why labour and bear when around them there are so many enticements? You are citizens of heaven, and your citizenship abides there. It is a real thing this heavenly law. You are called by the Christian name, you have felt the Christian consolation, you claim the Christian privilege. You are also under Christian allegiance; the Christian life is the life to which you are bidden, which you are trusted to live.

My brethren, reflect upon the obligations of our heavenly home. How many a delight you would willingly forego, if you were called away at once to Christ's presence; how pure you expect to be, how lowly you hope to be, how gentle, and earnest, and sincere, when you are in heaven. You will be temperate and guarded now; in purity, and lowliness, and gentleness, and earnestness, and sincerity, you must even now be living; for you are even now "*citizens of heaven.*" Sometimes the thought comes over us, how blessed to have been with Jesus when He was on earth; how we should have loved to follow Him; with what patience would we have taken His teachings and submitted to His rebukes; how gladly would we have given up all to follow Him; how cheerfully would we have gone out with the seventy to proclaim Him to all; how humble would we have been in His presence; how thoughtful of others, how careful of their feelings; how reverent to little children; how

heedful lest we should give or needlessly take offence ; how readily we would have forgiven ; how we would have welcomed self-denial, and endured the cross. All that, in such a case, we would have been we shall seek to be now as the force of the unseen kingdom constrains us ; as we reflect that to all this we are actually called, that all this is expected of us. For all this is but the law of heaven, and we are "*citizens of heaven.*" Many a man, reflecting on his end, hopes for a time of amendment ere he shall depart. He must purge himself of money-loving ; he would like to have the opportunity of unwonted generosity ; he will have his friends around him on his death-bed, and speak faithfully to them all ; he will forgive his enemies and be reconciled to alienated friends ; he will lay aside his dreams of ambition ; he will school himself in faith and meekness ; purged of all his follies, quit of every foible, with chastened, penitent, and lowly spirit, he longs to stand before his Lord. In all this, he shows his recognition of the heavenly character. And we are now citizens of heaven. Loyalty to our King and Lord, reverence for His authority, true regard for His laws would lead us even now thus to labour and to live. O, let us but recognize that our "*citizenship is in heaven,*" and we shall be freed from many a temptation, purged from many a sin. The noble privilege of a holy life will become to us the claim of heaven upon us now. Our hopes and aspirations and prayers will be the controlling influence of resolve and effort. Our penitence will be the pledge of our amendment ; our cry for deliverance from temptation will reveal to us the temptations against which we shall most earnestly struggle ; our pleadings for grace, our prayer for a holier, purer,

higher life will set us on a holier, purer, higher living. For in our prayers, we supplicate the privileges of heavenly citizens, and our privileges are our laws. The spirit of the heavenly kingdom will be the influence that forms our character, and loyalty will be the energy of our fidelity. "*Our country is in heaven,*" the heavenly life will be our life on earth.

II. The inspiration of hope. You will notice the sudden change in the character of Paul's writing; how having introduced the fact of the heavenly citizenship as an admonition, he turns at once to dwell on the hope which it inspires. "*Our citizenship is in the heavens, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*" Perhaps the reason is to be found in the circumstances under which he was writing. Did the very word "*citizenship*" remind him of the contrast between the fidelity of an earthly and that of the heavenly state? The Philippians had seen Paul's degradation change into triumph on the mention of the words, "I am a Roman citizen." They remembered how the men who had thrust him into a dungeon, and commanded him to be scourged and to have his feet made fast in the stocks, had come humbly entreating him to depart, and not to visit on them the consequences of their mistaken haste. Then the imperial law of Rome had been his protection; now he was enduring wrong at the hands of the Emperor himself. He had appealed to Cæsar, demanding to be judged of him, refusing not to die if he had anything

worthy of death, but claiming the protection of the law. Yet here he was in a Roman dungeon, wearied by delay, uncondemned, but enduring the fate of a malefactor. Of what value was his Roman citizenship to him, when law might be perverted and justice withheld? The contrast between partial human statecraft, the feeble human authority, and the eternal fidelity of the heavenly rule, comes up sharp before him; and, in a burst of triumph and of trust, he utters his expectation of his King's appearance. He is awaiting the Lord Jesus Christ; the King who rules in righteousness will come, will come as a Saviour. From all wrong He will deliver him, from shame and degradation. "We can trust Him," he is saying to the Philippians. "Our heavenly citizenship abides; and all christian hope shall be fulfilled at the coming of the Lord."

There is no one-sidedness in Paul's teaching. Faithful in admonition, he knows when admonition must cease, when to take up the language of personal consolation and hope." *Be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.*" "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." All this they could do. But they could not overcome the "*crooked and perverse nation*;" they could not change the wilful and rebellious; they were at the mercy of a tyrannical emperor, of unjust rulers, and an easily-excited mob; men could trouble them, even though they could not shake them. The

tears not yet dry upon his cheeks bore witness to the power of unfaithful men to distress him in his fidelity. But the falling tears glow with a heavenly confidence as he dwells on Him whom they are all expecting. We shall be delivered from the crooked and perverse; snatched out of the reach of injustice, vindicated against the enemies of the cross of Christ. Where we are powerless, He is strong. Our own true Lord will surely come and save us.

Paul knew also what was the bondage of the body: a bondage which none can entirely escape. How often had the zeal of his spirit worn out the feeble flesh! That the fleshly thorn might be taken from him, he "*thrice besought the Lord.*" And although Christ's "*grace*" was "*sufficient for him;*" and although he could "*glory in his infirmity,*" it was an infirmity, and he felt it such. "*His bodily presence*" was "*weak, and his speech contemptible.*" His fidelity and earnestness and courage, the power of the Spirit within him, might so avail as that even before this weak frame sinners should tremble; there was no hesitancy in his speech when he glowed with the indignant judgment of an apostle. But he does feel the weakness of the body; he does long for a freer and more powerful tongue. It is deeply pathetic to think of this man of nobler than iron will, of will inspired of God; this man of undaunted courage, of quenchless patience, of deathless energy; it is deeply pathetic to think of him as suffering shame and humiliation because of the tried and suffering bodily frame. He was stricken on the mouth, because, unable to see who was speaking to him, he rebuked the high priest. He "*bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus,*" the painful scars of scourging.

He shivered with the cold and damps of his dungeon, and asks that a cloak he had left behind him at Troas may be sent to him before another winter. Hunger preyed upon him; the man who would gladly have devoted every moment to preaching Jesus Christ was obliged to bend over the hard sail-cloth, and his own hands ministered to his necessities. It all flashes upon us as we hear him speak of "*the body of his humiliation.*" The silence of a life time is broken in this one utterance. We learn how he suffered, how he was ashamed of his bodily necessities, with the noble humiliation of a lofty spirit thwarted and baffled in its yearnings by the body in which he was "cribb'd, cabin'd, and confin'd."

"*The body of our humiliation,*" he calls it; that is different from a "vile body." He is finding no fault with the body, it is answering the purpose of humiliation for which it was designed. His master was keeping him down in feeble flesh; that in these his struggles he might be made more lowly, that any spiritual pride in him might be checked, that he might learn submission, might be purged from impatience, that he might learn how to do his Master's will in the humbling way of his Master's appointment. Think of it, you of hasty and impetuous spirits; you who fret at the limitations of nature or of circumstances; you who proudly talk of your aspirations, and indulge in a melancholy grandiloquence bordering close on rebellion against God, concerning the restrictions of your aspiring soul, the hinderments to your high purposes. This man, noblest, perhaps, of all who have borne Christ's image; this eager soul, aflame with zeal, burning to do Christ's work, felt himself thwarted and hindered by his body, and submitted him-

self meekly to the restriction. It was humiliation to him; but he bore it uncomplainingly, as he would have borne much more for his Master's sake. Year after year he submitted, and almost the only hint we have of what he suffered is in these words, in which he reveals his longing to be free: "*who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory.*"

Nor is he anticipating such a blessed transformation for himself alone; he utters the hope that he may cheer others in their endurance. Bodily feebleness is not the only form of bodily humiliation. How many a soul in its aspirations after purity is hindered by the force of passion. "*The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life;*" the arrogance of strength; the fretfulness of pain; the consequences of sensual indulgence, hereditary, or carried on after penitence through a life of struggle; the dazed imagination; faith dimmed by nervous irritability; the depression that comes of bodily causes, but is felt as though it were spiritual decline; the heats of excitement now making faith fanaticism, and then dying into an ague coldness; the fear of death; bitter self-accusations which the conscience will not endorse, but which the man cannot escape: O how humbling is the history of all these things. And yet they are a needed discipline. How many a life that, nearing the heights of saintship, has trembled on the abysses of spiritual pride, has been brought low and chastened and restrained by these. How often, when we have been vaunting ourselves on our christian attainments, have we been startled, like Nebuchadnezzar, by discovering in ourselves the heart of a beast. Wisely

ordered of God is the body of our humiliation, lest the terrible sin of spiritual arrogance should be ours. But wise and kind as is the discipline, we long for it to be over. Our body is, indeed, a "*body of humiliation*;" we must have it changed before we can be free. But we shall be free. He who can "*subdue all things to him*," has energy for our deliverance, and we await His delivering advent. Guard we the spirit; struggle we on, faithful, loyal to Him; and He by the energy with which He is able even to subdue all things unto Him, will "*change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory*."

And still it is the christian hope with which Paul is inspired. He speaks not of the delight it shall be to him to be free; he speaks of the subduing of all things unto Christ. "*Fashioned like unto the body of his glory*;" here is, indeed, the casting of the crown before Christ. Affection rejoices to be like the Saviour; loyalty rejoices in entire subjection to Him.

We shall not fully apprehend the force of this Apostolic injunction, unless we remember the circumstances under which it was written. Epaphroditus had come, bringing with him some money that the Philippian Christians had sent for their loved Apostle's support; and by the hands of Epaphroditus Paul sends back his acknowledgments in this letter. Try to picture to yourselves the return of the messenger and the gathering of the Philippian Church.

He would tell them that he had found Paul imprisoned in Nero's barracks, chained perhaps by one arm to a

soldier; that he had found him in feeble health, depressed in spirit, with only one friend near him for his consolation. He would tell them with how much joy the Apostle had welcomed him; how full his heart was still of affection for these his best-loved children, how grateful for their remembrance of him; how thoughtful of Epaphroditus in his sickness, how anxious he was lest they should be unduly anxious for Epaphroditus. The letter is opened, and they mark its tone of sadness. They think of him writing it in uncertainty what his fate shall be, never far from martyrdom for Christ's sake. They see the tear-stains; he glows with no indignation; he can but "weep" as he speaks of "*the enemies of the cross of Christ.*" And what is the message of this affectionate, worn, and weary man? What has he to say, the old and tried Apostle, to his dear children in Christ? Nothing but to commend their loyalty to Christ, and to urge them to perfect it. "*To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" "*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or in my absence hear of your affairs, I may find you standing fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*"

He has endured many a hardship since he saw them, and they have many adversaries; but his own devotedness to Jesus is the same, and he would have them steadfast in their allegiance. Persecution has not daunted his spirit, nor does the pain of Christ's service keep him from appealing to them to continue faithful.

But one thing makes him anxious for them, the little "*strifes and envyings*" that are among them. "*I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the*

same mind in the Lord." It is pain to Him when christians "*seek their own things,*" and are emulous and envious of one another. He would have them "*perfect*" in Christ's spirit; the self-denying "*mind that was in Jesus*" must dwell in them all. How it must have moved them to find his soul unshaken in its loyalty by all his trials; to mark that he has but one desire for them all, that they walk worthy of Jesus Christ. All other hopes have long since faded out of his life; the storm of passion is hushed; from the silence of the dungeon, where he still finds the opportunity of winning men to Christ, he writes words the whole meaning and point of which is an admonition to them to be faithful to Christ. Would not the Philippians feel that nothing else was worth living for or seeking after, was worth their thought or care for an instant, than entire and hearty allegiance to Christ?

Soft and solemn as dying words, hallowed by tears, warm with affection, earnest with the fidelity of a life true to his exhortations, come these his words to us, in which he claims our loyalty and confirms our hope: "*Our home is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*"



XIX.

THE UNCTION FROM THE HOLY ONE.

I JOHN ii. 20.

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

THE word here rendered 'unction' literally signifies anointing oil. Its reference is to the anointing of men who were set apart to special Divine service. The act of anointing was the symbolical act of consecration; the oil symbolized the endowments with which God fitted them for their work. Oil was itself a means of vigour among Eastern peoples. The wrestler gave ease to his movements and suppleness to his limbs by the use of oil. Anointing at feasts was an expression of that fulness of life, that fulness of powers, which is the essence of true prosperity. The sacred oil with which the priests were consecrated, compounded of rich and varied medicaments, was the symbol of the manifold endowments of the Holy Spirit which should be given to all God's consecrated people. Paul in 2 Cor. i. 21, 22, says, "*He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*" The anointing and the sealing are but different images of the

same thing ; the consecrating call and purpose of God, and the graces that come in consecration. Combining these two thoughts, Christian consecration and the endowments of grace, we have the meaning of our text : “ *Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.* ”

The virtue of Christian consecration,—this, then, is to be the subject of our meditation this morning, and specially its power to discern between truth and error. It is, I think, a pity that the word rendered ‘*unction*’ is not rendered literally ‘*chrism*.’ The word ‘*unction*’ needs as much explanation as the word ‘*chrism*’ would have needed ; and the word ‘*unction*’ does not, as ‘*chrism*’ would, immediately suggest the word “Christ.” John is intending to contrast the “*chrism*” with the “*antichrist*,” the Spirit with which christians are endowed because of their fellowship with Christ with the spirit of error that is opposed to Him.

The coming of antichrist was the sign of the last times. All the floating sinfulness and error that before Christ’s advent had shown itself in so many forms, was now to reveal itself in definite antagonism to Him, was to reveal itself in the denial that Jesus was the messenger and revelation of God. Christ is the last and highest revelation of God ; in Him culminates all the “*grace and truth*” God had in store for the world. They who receive Him can reach no higher truth ; for those who reject Him, there are no further manifestations and influences of God to convict and restore them. The issue of the struggle between Christ and antichrist is to close up this world’s history. Whatever gave definiteness to the contest was a sign of the end of the world ; to John, the fact that there were already men

denying that Jesus was the Christ of God, was a token that this was "*the last time*," that the depravity of the world was assuming its last and most malignant phase. We have seen the development of that struggle of which John saw the beginning; the conflicts of the world are more and more gathering themselves around the name and person, the claims and influence of Christ. Is the gospel true or is it false? Is Christ, indeed, the Son of Man, the revelation of all that is real and true in humanity? is He, indeed, the Son of God, the revelation of the character and will of the Father? The Spirit of antichrist, a definite and avowed antagonism to Jesus Christ, is working in the world and in the church. We too witness many antichrists: subtle signs of a spirit opposed to Christ revealing itself in many and diverse ways. We know that we are exposed to these seductions; falsehood wearing the garb of truth; many a time-honoured habit and tradition concealing an essential denial of Christ; a spirit and a tone in society, and in the church itself, and sanctioned by venerated names, which involve nothing less than the rejection of the precepts and teachings of the gospel. These are the seductions by which we may be deluded, these the temptations by which we are beset. And John here affirms, that we are safe against them in the possession of the Spirit of Christ. In our consecration to Him, in our fellowship with His anointing, is given us a Spirit that cannot be deceived. We look through all falsity and discern the truth. "*Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*"

I. Observe that this is a common christian endowment. It is to a body of christian disciples that John is

writing; not to the highly gifted among them, the men of subtle genius or clear intellectual insight; not to skilful reasoners who can see all the far-reaching bearings of a truth; not even to the elder christians who have acquired a long experience and grown prudent through a life's discipline; but to all. So simple are they that he calls them "*little children.*" He warns them to "*keep themselves from idols.*" He is speaking not to those who have long continued faithful; they are admonished that they "*abide in Christ.*" He tells them all, all who have received the spirit of discipleship, that the "*anointing*" which they have received "*abideth*" in them, "*and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*"

Now, my brethren, when we look around us and see the dangers to which our christian life is exposed; when we see changes passing upon christian sentiment and form of doctrine, many of which are perversions of christian truth; when we contemplate the practical temptations of the society in which we live; to what is it we look that we may be kept steadfast in the truth, preserved in the reality of christian life? Is it not very largely to what we have different from, superior to the common sort of christian people? We have acute and cultivated minds; we can reason well; we are accustomed to look into the meaning of words and the bearing of facts; we have been well taught in the faith; we have great knowledge of the world, and are not likely to be deluded. All these gifts are good gifts indeed, and God has blessed any on whom He has bestowed them; but

it is not of these John speaks when he tells the disciples that they are able to judge of all things. It is of what all christians have in common; the young believer as well as the mature saint; the unskilful and the simple, as well as the wise and the wary. He speaks of a gift bestowed upon them in their very [consecration to Christ, and involved in that consecration; the endowment of a spirit, the Spirit of the Holy One, in which all are sharers.

When you are sending out your children into the world; of whom among them are you most confident that they will live good and useful lives, that they will retain their purity amid seductions, and be safe amid the temptations to which they will be exposed? Is it the clever ones, those of keen insight, those who have shown early signs of acuteness and self-possession? or is it not rather the simple ones, those of single purpose and earnest resolve? Cleverness is often but a snare; of it is bred self-confidence that is near a fall. And in any case, simple conscientiousness is of more practical value than the readiest ability. A plain unlettered man will often see the falsity which ensnares men in their long-drawn reasonings. A child's discernment of character is proverbial; the simple soul is repelled from a hidden impurity or ungraciousness that escapes the subtle observation. John himself, who writes so calmly and so certainly about the errors of antichrist was an "*unlearned and ignorant*" man. But he had been with Jesus and abode in Him. Nor are we surprised at his clear perception of the truth, and his unflinching grasp of it amidst the delusive wisdom that was around him. For his heart so entirely Christ's, his sympathies so true

because so thoroughly with Jesus, could pierce through all plausibilities; the Spirit that he had received from Christ was a divine instinct within him; he looked on what was true and good, and recognized it; he looked on error and on evil, and at once detected it.

“Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” A mind like Christ is given to you in the very consecration of yourselves to Him; and that mind *“abideth in you,”* and *“teacheth you all things.”* You have an inward and unfailing standard, which tests all sayings, all traditions and maxims, all the suggestions that may come to you, all the ways of the world. We look with joyful confidence to the future of any one who has yielded himself to the call of Christ in His gospel. We can anticipate, without discomposure, whatever may befall him in life; for we know that *“all things work together for good to them that love God.”* Trust in Him will be their consolation in trouble, a gladness greater than when corn and wine abound. It will be the sanctity of their prosperity; all joy will be hallowed, taken as His gift. We are *“confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* Their life will be a discipline of God; He will teach them by the course of His providence, will direct their movements, and order their pathway, so that everything shall be fraught with sacred lessons; and, at the end of life, they shall recognize how every day illustrated His counsel and fulfilled His will. May we not also take all the confidence with which our text inspires us, and recognize in the christian character itself their sure defence against error and temptation? If they are plain and ignorant people,

yet they will be delivered from delusion by the sure instincts of christian devotedness. If they have many and varied gifts, talents and force of character, clearness of judgment, and varied mental faculties; these shall all minister to the efficiency of a christian life. The Spirit of Christ will guard them from self-confidence; devotedness to Him will quell their passion and animate their purpose, will be the sacred inspiration of all their thinking, their controlling purpose in all their lives. From all false judgment, from all temptation, this will be their defence; the Spirit of Christ abiding in them, giving them discernment in all things.

II. Observe what this Spirit is which is given us in our consecration, and by which we are enabled to discern the truth of things.

a. It is the spirit of the consecration itself. How many suggestions are given us in that word consecration, in the idea of a consecrated life? It involves God's revelation to us of a Divine service, and His call to us to serve Him; God's endowment of us for the service into which He bids us enter. It involves our recognition of His purpose, our acceptance of His will, and all the influence upon our character of the acceptance of it. When Samuel anointed Saul in the name of the Lord, and told him that the Lord had chosen him captain of his inheritance, he prophesied, "*The Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt be turned into another man.*" And as Saul went on his way, pondering on the new scheme of life thus opened up before him, all its grandeur dawned upon him. In that hour his vision cleared, and diviner sympathies were his; he attained an insight into God's counsel that

ennobled him, so that when he joined the company of the prophets, he was already another man. He was one with them in feeling and in vision, and Saul also prophesied. When David was called from the sheepfold and anointed in the midst of his brethren, "*The Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward.*" His vision took in higher cares than those of the sheepfold, and in consequence the sheepfold was itself more holy to him. The throne of Israel was before him; God's service of ruling the people was given into his hand; and he looked more reverently on men henceforward, mindful of what God would have him do among them. His own life was more sacred; the influence of his consecration made him guard himself. When a not altogether unrighteous indignation prompted him to slay King Saul, who was within his power, his larger reverence for the sacred character attaching to one whom God had separated to Himself held his hand, and he refused to slay the Lord's anointed. Have we not in these narratives illustrations of the spirit that comes to men with their very sense of consecration? When the call of the gospel is heard by us, and God's purpose to sanctify our life is recognized, and all our future opens before us a scheme of life that God has hallowed by claiming it for His service; when our days no longer dawn on us in dulness, but are aglow with the light of holiness, the warmth of love; when no longer we feel as idlers, weary loiterers along the world's paths, but are inspired with the sense of a divine purpose given to be fulfilled by us, can it be that no change shall pass upon our character? will not our views of all things be clearer and truer? is not our whole mode of judgment changed? If the call

of human duty often clears the vision of the indolent, and human affections, and the interest of others in us, and the sense of a human love can open our eyes to the sanctity of character and conduct, and be as the inspiration of truth to all our judgments, shall not the claim and the tenderness of God in His separation of us to His service be as a sacred chrism, the anointing of our eyes that we see, the virtue of a new unfailing discernment of the evil and the good ?

Decision of purpose is the secret of directness of judgment. We shake ourselves free from the influence of many a deluding motive, we are able to look right through plausibilities and discern hidden falsehood, we are delivered from confusion in the simple fact of our acceptance of one aim in life. The force of error lies largely in the heart that wavers from the truth. The temptations that draw you so subtly, the persuasiveness of much that you more than half suspect to be utterly bad, your halting and hesitating between conflicting appeals and inducements—do you not know that you could cleave through all these at once if only you were single in your aim ? “ *If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.*” When you resolved that you would follow Christ, and obey Him in all your future, when you yielded your heart to His guidance and accepted the service to which He was bidding you, did you not feel at once a new power to discern the evil and good of all things ? You looked on old confusing motives, and pronounced them base. Doubt cleared itself from your vision ; the scales of selfishness fell from your eyes ; you felt that you had attained a new power of judgment. A truer spirit, a spirit clearer and more confident, was

yours in your consecration. "*You had an unction from the Holy One, and you knew all things.*"

b. It is the spirit of Christ. "*Ye have an unction from the Holy One ;*" a chrism from Christ. The Saviour was Himself the Anointed One. He was "*consecrated of the Father, and sent into the world ;*" and His "*meat and drink,*" the meaning of His whole life, "*was to do the will of the Father, and to finish his work.*" "*The Spirit of the Lord*" was upon Him, for the Lord had "*anointed*" Him. "*He whom God sent*" spake ever the words of God, for God gave not "*the Spirit by measure unto him.*" And of His Spirit have we received ; we have fellowship with the Father and the Son. The mind that was in Christ is the mind that is given to us ; we are partakers of the Spirit of Jesus.

Here, then, is the virtue of our consecration ; this our defence against all antichrists, this our power to discern all things ; the spirit in sympathy with Jesus, that feels with and for Him. A personal life is a surer standard than all reasonings ; sympathy is at once responsive, or is at once repelled. When we are puzzling ourselves to know whether teaching is sound or unsound, dismayed, perhaps, by a long array of texts that men seem able to make say what they choose, here is an immediate solution to our questions ; we need only ask, "Has this teaching the spirit of Christ or not ?" When we are interrogating ourselves about courses of conduct, asking what is right and what is wrong, what expedient and what inexpedient, we may, if we choose, soon learn the true way of action : "doing which shall I be most like Christ ?" And the spirit that comes from and abides in Him has no need of the teaching of any

man. It is itself "*truth, and is no lie.*" The habit of fellowship with Christ; the culture of our sympathies, the formation of all our judgments by His; the bringing of every maxim and of all conduct to the standard of the life of Jesus, will have its result in clear directness of thought and feeling. It will give thoroughness and practicalness to our character; will demand not only truth upon the whole, but truth in everything, truth in even minor matters, truth throughout. "*I have not written unto you,*" says John, "*because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.*" There were men in John's days, as there are men in ours, who were ready to tell lies and to act lies for Christ's sake; who, to advance what they thought a good cause, would condescend to unworthy concealments or evasions; who would tolerate iniquitous behaviour, unrighteous decisions, if the church demanded it, or if some good work might, as they thought, be furthered thereby. Such men would essay to teach their simpler brethren, would treat their scruples as ignorance, and would ask from them a more enlightened judgment; they might speak of their larger experience of men and churches as leading them to the recognition of such unpleasant necessities. This is the subtlest form of antichrist, "*Satan*" appearing as "*an angel of light.*" And against such a so-called Christian prudence, John appeals to the earnestness, the instinct, the sympathy with Christ of every one like-spirited with Him. "*Ye know that no lie is of the truth;*" ye can detect the essential falsity of all such pleas and hypocrisies. Ye know what Christ would feel concerning these, how Christ would condemn them. "*Ye have an unction from the Holy*

One ;" ye are partakers of His Spirit, "*and ye know all things.*"

It is the "*Holy One*" whose unction we have received, and holiness is power of discernment. The test of a true prophet among the Jews was the coming to pass of what he foretold ; but Moses warns them that there might arise among them a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, who should give a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder might come to pass ; and yet, if the prophet would draw them after other gods, they were not to listen to him ; "*for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*" And the apostles warn the disciples against those whose well-seeming words, or whose wonderful signs, might only be the attractions of falsehood. Christ Himself speaks of those who should "*deceive, if it were possible, the very elect.*" There is in us all an indolent desire to set up infallible standards by which to judge of words and actions apart from the sure discrimination of Christian character. It would save us so much responsibility to try all by some formal sign ; we want to be relieved of the exercise of our conscience and judgment. But there is no infallible standard except this anointing from the Holy One. Whatever sullies the conscience, whatever impairs the force of our Christian judgment, whatever pollutes the life, whatever renders us in feeling and character unlike Christ, is false and evil ; and God has chosen that this shall be our only certainty in discernment. He would prove us whether we love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul. He would invigorate our Christian conscience by claiming from it this constant discrimination ; would

have us depend upon and ever trust the assured spirit of fellowship with Christ.

The traditions of the past, a form of creed or practice taught us even by those we most revere, maxims that we have learned by rote, the ceremonies and modes of viewing things belonging to christian societies, can be no security to us. Without the sure decisions of the heart in union with Christ, these may be most delusive. And where the heart is at one with Him, no other teaching is needed. The whole strain of responsibility for our beliefs and our actions is thrown on our christian character. And christian character is clearness of judgment, security against error and temptation. We have fellowship with the Holy One, we have the chrism of Christ, we have the Spirit of Jesus, and we know all things.

c. The spirit of consecration is the spirit of devotedness to our fellows. Priests and kings were anointed in symbol of their dedication to the service of their brethren; the chrism was their rebuke, if they indulged in any personal triumphs in their dignity; they were consecrated, not to enjoyment, but to work for others. When Christ began His ministry in Nazareth, and declared in Himself the fulfilment of prophetic words, He also proclaimed the service which He was set apart to render: "*the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*"

We share in Christ's consecration; His purpose is

ours ; ours too is the Spirit that dwelt in Him ; we have a chrism from Christ. In these times of social, political, scientific, and religious controversy, we hear much about unchristian speculation and teaching opposed to the Gospel. We learn here how to detect it, how to be on our guard against it. Our security lies not in our adherence to any party, nor in condemnation of any school. We are not saved from error by the maxims of a sect ; the devotion to men which we have learnt from Christ will be our protection. Whatever destroys our reverence for men, whatever denies their redemption and restrains our sympathies with them ; whatever binds his fetters on the slave and makes us content with human misery and degradation ; especially whatever leads us to distrust the power of the gospel to elevate and save from folly, and from selfishness, and from sin, any class of men, or race of men, or any individual of all mankind, must be condemned by us as owning the spirit of antichrist. Our fellowship is with Christ's love and hopefulness ; a spirit devoted like His to men is given us, and by this spirit we discern all things.

Christ spoke to His disciples of the wisdom of parental affection. "*Ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children.*" The parental instinct is more trustworthy than regard for self ; men will often withhold from their children what they are foolish enough to indulge themselves in. The sympathies of a loving heart will often defend us from mistake, when mere regard for ourselves might lead us astray. In our judgment of the world, in our intercourse with society, we are often warned, guarded, corrected by consideration for others. The principle of Christian expediency

enforced by Paul, the habit of caring for "*weaker*" consciences, the "*becoming all things to all men,*" will purify and enlarge the judgment, lend security from personal temptation, and add elevation to personal character.

It is impossible to prescribe rules for the regulation of our conduct under all circumstances and in every sphere. To do so is not the end of the gospel; "*where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;*" "*we are not under law, but under grace.*" Christian character is the director of christian life. The true heart of Christ within us is never-failing discernment, clearness of decision, promptitude of resolve, and stability of will. The Spirit of Christ is the possession of all who consecrate themselves to Him. "*Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*"



XX.

A SERMON ON CHURCH-BUILDING.*

ISAIAH liv. 2.

Lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.

THE image of our text is taken from tent-building. The cords are those which support the pole of a tent and that bear the weight of the canvas curtains. The stakes are those to which these ropes are fastened; on which, driven into the ground, falls the strain of pole and canvas. The prophet with the thoughtfulness of "*a wise master-builder*," points out the need of strengthening the stakes when the tent itself is enlarged. They will have to support a greater weight of curtain, and resist a greater strain; they must, therefore, be made bigger, be driven more deeply into the earth, stand more firmly. Put into language more accordant with our modern European habits, the words of the prophet would run somewhat thus:—Enlarge the place of thy habitation; make longer walls, give them greater height,

* This sermon was preached immediately after the congregation had resolved to erect a new church. It has been previously published, but those to whom this volume is dedicated will probably not deem it out of place here.

and your roof a broader span ; sink, therefore, their foundations deeper, make them stronger and more massive.

I purpose illustrating by our text the need of fuller christian life, in order to carry on enlarged christian operations. There is a spiritual truth in emblem here ; the more work we have to do, the more thorough must be our consecration ; increased strength is needed to fulfil our larger expectations. Godly effort is effort for God, it is also effort sustained by God. The work alone will not be enough ; if claims are great and our obedience be ready, the spirit must be strengthened. Our fuller obedience necessitates fuller spiritual life. You will at once see the propriety of my dwelling on such a subject at this time. We have undertaken new work for God. Believing that He has called us to build a larger house of prayer, we have accepted not only the responsibilities of building, but also the increased responsibilities which the building will involve when it is raised. In every society there are persons given to gloomy forebodings, and it will be strange if we meet with none such. We may be told that there is great danger of being deluded by signs of an external and fallacious prosperity ; danger that our own spiritual welfare will suffer, and the peace and piety of the church be endangered by our attempt to fill a larger space, and exert more influence in the neighbourhood. Now, without retorting upon these prophets of evil ; without asking them whether christian life and the prosperity of churches are not even more endangered by quiet enjoyment of things as they are, and a selfish spiritual seclusion, let us frankly admit that there are these and other perils. We shall be

tempted to rest in our efforts, as though they were themselves piety. We may find that attention to minute details, and the wear and fret of the business engagements in which we are involved, threaten to impoverish our spirits, tend to call us from communion with God and meditation on His truth. What then? Though this is a temptation it is by no means a necessity. The danger is here, but not only may the danger be averted, our work may itself lead us into fuller communion with God, into deeper earnestness in personal, spiritual, and social religious life. How shall we avoid the danger? how improve our undertaking as a means of grace? How shall we work so as not only to build a larger house for God and do more for our neighbourhood, but likewise grow in grace by our very labour? These are the questions to which I hope now to suggest a few practical hints by way of answer.

I. We must bear constantly in mind that this is work for God. The ground on which the building will stand has been purchased free of all incumbrance, and made over for the service of God for ever. The church will be built, not to last your time or mine, but to stand for many generations, and it will be given up to God. While stone and mortar shall hold together, it will be God's house. Once put in trust for Him, it can never be recalled. So long as the laws of our country remain to protect christian congregations, the building will be God's. Gifts once consecrated to this purpose will remain consecrated; the money cannot become again the property of the giver; never again will it be applied to business, or to any of the lower ends of life. The language of the trust-deed may remind us of another fact; the house will

be for God's glory, not for our comfort or honour. We are building, not that you may have more roomy pews, nor that we may delight our eyes with graceful forms and pleasant colours; we shall meet for worship in God's house, not in our own. It will not be our joint-stock building, we make it over to God. Nor are we building for denominational glory: not at all to vindicate the right of Dissenters to Gothic arches and to spires. If we build beautifully, it is because we desire to honour God with what is most beautiful and best. The gift is hallowed, for it is God's; "*the temple sanctifieth the gold.*"

This sense of consecration should belong, not only to the gifts of money that are offered, but also to those of time and thought and care. One petition should never be forgotten in our prayers for the success of our effort; that architect, and builder, and committee of management, and all who look at the progress of the work and offer suggestions, may be under the constant conviction that they are working for God. So far as we have gone, I heartily believe we have been so animated; we have come to our decisions, persuaded that what is fittest for our sacred purpose is the fittest offering we can make to God. And if this conviction continues to influence us, we may be sure that there will be unremitting attention, constant care; we may hope also for a successful issue. We sometimes think admiringly of the strength and grace of the temple, that it stood so long and was a work of such marvellous beauty: but we need not wonder, when we read of the care with which it was wrought; of the conscientious directions given concerning even nails and chains; of the thought devoted to the adornment of the inmost place, clouded in darkness,

and never trodden by foot of man except by the High Priest, for a few moments, once a year. They wrought for God—

“ They dreamt not of a perishable home
Who thus could build.”

And the mystery of our middle age cathedrals and churches is explained, the fact that they stand now, so many of them, fresh and beautiful as on the day of their dedication, when we read the lives of their builders. They were conscientious in their work, severely conscientious, pious in the choice of stone and timber, in the shape of a window or the height of a column, feeling that they were at work for God. Whatsoever they did, they did “*unto the Lord, and not unto men,*” and, therefore, they did it heartily and well. So, in our measure, let it be with us. We may not have the time, the wealth, the skill they lavished on their buildings; but we may have the conscience and the care. Everything for God; work, thought, earnestness, all given up to Him. How hallowed and hallowing will then be our labour! The mind and heart laid upon the altar will be sanctified; and we shall be holier, more sober and devouter men for our work.

And, because it is for God that this house is to be built, it shall be as beautiful as we can make it. Remembering that we are serving God in the erection of a congregational church; that we have to provide accommodation for so many hundreds, who shall see one minister and hear his voice, and who, feeling each others' presence, shall enjoy in their worship the “*communion of saints,*” we will provide that accommodation in as *graceful* a form as possible. The building shall be as

beautiful as we can afford ; and, if there should even seem to be a lavish expenditure, after Christ's commendation of the gift of the precious ointment poured on Him, and the broken alabaster box, who shall dare ask, with Judas, "*To what purpose is this waste ?*" Our Lord will not accept for His service money unjustly taken from the wants of family or creditors ; but money taken from ourselves He will accept. Deny yourself, and your Master will welcome the gift of love. It is strange how people who believe in the Bible that speaks of the "*beauty of holiness,*" who believe that God ordained the building of the "*holy and beautiful house*" on Mount Zion, can talk as if now-a-days there could scarcely be holiness and beauty together. Looking at churches with their goodly stones and buildings, they say, "What do you mean by your spires and columns and arches ? do you think God is pleased with your prettinesses ?" Well, we only know God from the Bible and from His world ; and the Bible tells us "*that God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.*" I suppose that means that the wide sweep of green meadow and yellow corn-field is good ; good in its freshness and its bowing grace, as well as in the fact that it will sustain so many beasts and men. God is surely pleased with the apple-blossom, as well as with the apple-fruit ; with the purple of the grape and its rich odour, as well as with its sweetness and its strength. We see what God has done to please us ; He has made us "*glad with his works.*" He has not thought it beneath Him to make a beautiful world for men, shall not our grateful offerings be like His gracious gifts ?

Is not God pleased when men take pains to offer Him

their best? God asks our hearts, it is true, and our hands: He also asks our thought. If we cannot make a beautiful thing, if we cannot see the beauty of what is beautiful, then He will not expect this from us. But if men can construct anything beautiful, or if they can reward others for the time and thought they expend on it, then God is pleased. We dare not say that He is not pleased with mere material grandeur and grace; with the world around us and the Bible in our hands, I dare to say He is. But more than with this is He pleased, when men give thought and deny themselves that they may offer of their very best. Do you think God is as well pleased when ministers preach a careless, indolent, ill-thought sermon, as when they preach with as much thoughtfulness and tenderness and care as they can bring to their work? Why, then, should we think Him as well pleased with a carelessly, thoughtlessly constructed building, as with one that shows attention, and an effort to make it as good and beautiful as possible. You say a church is, after all, only a thing of stones and mortar, timber and metal; you say an organ is but pipes and bellows, keys and pedals. I say it is much more: it is men's thought, men's effort, men's care. "*Awake up, my glory,*" says David,—my glory, that is, my mind, my thought, all my skill and carefulness. "*My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory; awake psaltery and harp; I myself will awake right early.*" And when the heart is fixed, the glory of thought and fancy, of carefulness and skill, will awake to praise him. Only let the consecration attach to the beauty as well as to the gift itself; let us seek for grace, not to please our-

selves who offer, but Him to whom the offering is made; let mind and thought be His as well as heart, and then we shall be devouter for the very loveliness of our offering. It is God's; let it, therefore, be our best; "*the altar sanctifieth the gift*" and the giver.

So far, then, we have seen how the lengthening of the cords and the strengthening of the stakes may go on together: the determination to offer God a new house for His worship, the consecration of ourselves to this work, will have a sanctifying influence upon us, and our spiritual life will be deepened by our effort. Notice:—

II. We must ever remember that the readiness and ability to work for God come from Himself, and must be sustained by communion with Him and prayer to Him. "*Who am I,*" said David, when he dedicated to the Lord the gold and silver, the brass and iron he had collected, to be, after his death, used by Solomon for the temple; "*Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.*" He calls to mind that God had made of him, a shepherd-boy, a great and wealthy prince, and had given Israel prosperity under his rule, so that they could come to Him with their thousands of costly talents. And much more, God had given them the heart to do it. He had inspired David with the holy purpose to dedicate them to this end, and had filled the people with a spirit generously responsive to their king's appeal.

Everything we do for God should make us thankful that we can do anything. It is an infinite privilege to be able to offer Him of ours. The more we can do, the greater our blessing; for all comes of Him, and of His

own to we give Him. What a testimony to God's goodness have we in the mere money that we offer. Of how many years' prosperity, how much success in business, how much blessing of our basket and our store, does this speak! It speaks of business perplexities solved; of many forebodings, in times of commercial panic and failure of men around you, averted: it speaks of success in life beyond what you could have hoped. Some of you, when you began life, perhaps but a few years ago, would never have thought that to-day you could afford to give so much. Or if you never had the struggle and toil of making the money you now offer, what does that mean but that God has been always, was even before your birth, providing that you should be abundantly supplied? That you have time to spare; that you have left from the carking cares of daily life, the energy needed for such service; how much does that indicate of well-doing and peace of mind? The business tact which makes you useful here; is not that a gift? That you have the confidence of a Christian church, and are appointed to a place of trust and honour, that too is a great blessing from God. But most of all is the heart to offer willingly. That you can rejoice in laying down money and time, in exercising thought; that you are determined earnestly to labour in response to the generous confidence of your brethren; that you have the will to do all for Christ's sake, for the advancement of His gospel and the spread of His truth among men:—"Who am I, and what is my people" that God should have blessed us thus? Let us, for a moment, pause in our meditations, and offer up, in the silence of our hearts, our devout thanksgiving that He has put this honour upon us. Often may our heart

thus thrill with gratitude during the progress of our work! We shall not glory in ourselves when we glory in God. We shall be humbler men when our labours are peacefully ended, because we have thus been again and again reminded of our Father's gifts to us undeserving, cold-hearted, often ungrateful children.

The heart to offer willingly is the greatest blessing. There may be some here, poor, humble, little known, feeling as if they were left out of this work and privilege. No, my brethren, you are not. The church of Christ does look, with her Lord, upon the poor widow casting into the treasury her two mites. We thankfully recognize that there is often great richness of faith where there is not even one mite to spare; great devotedness, which our Lord sees in those whom we, because we do not know them, may be overlooking. The thought, the prayer for the success of Christ's work; they who can offer only that are blessed when they offer only that. The ready mind, the willing heart; this is the greatest gift. Without this, the costliest offerings are worthless. The cords may be lengthened, but the tent will fall, because the stake is feeble. Our hearts in the work, gratefully in the work; here is the source of our strength, the assurance that we shall be blessed in working.

All the skill and prudence needed for our work must come from God. *"The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber,*

to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan : and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee ; the tabernacle, the ark and the mercy seat, and the furniture of the tabernacle, the table, the candlestick, and the altar of burnt offering, with their furniture, and the cloths, and the garments, the oil, and the incense." The Jews were accustomed to look on all strength and skill as gifts of God's own inspiring ; to trace to Him the might of Samson, and the tact of Solomon, the power to work in brass of Hiram of Tyre, the art of carpenter and blacksmith, apothecary and tailor. God put it into men's hearts to copy the olive and the palm, to make chapiters of flowers, to carve the pomegranate, and to deck the place with jewels and hewn stones. Were the Jews wrong in thinking that God gives instruction in such mere worldly matters ? Or rather, are not we wrong, who think that there can be any "*good gift, or perfect gift,*" which cometh not "*down from the Father of lights ?*" Whatever of taste, or prudence, or energy, may belong to builder or counsellor, is assuredly of God, and He will teach us how to build a house for Him. His are all forms of grace and strength. He who in the mount showed Moses the patterns of all things in the tabernacle, is still calling out men, instructing them on hill-tops, under cliff and crag, and in the forest, giving them suggestions to catch and copy, shewing them what arch and column, spire and window, should be like. "*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.*" I am sure, if we do not seek this help and direction in all our meetings, we shall be likely miserably to fail.

He will teach us everything we have to do ; and for this He will be inquired of by us to do it for us.

The heart to offer may, perhaps, for a season fail us. There may be hours when we shall shrink from the responsibility of choice and decision ; when we could even wish that, like the birds in the open woods, we had only to enter into a place of God's own building, and there worship Him. There will be the pressure of duty ; there will be weariness and vexation and difficulty. To God we must look for help. He will refresh our souls ; He will confirm us in prudent counsels ; He will help us to bear our responsibilities ; He will keep us in courage and hope ; He will renew the spirit of consecration. Our help is in the heavens, and it will be ours as we pray for it.

So will our work bring us into communion with God ; and then our cares, instead of fretting us, and wearing us out, and interfering with our spiritual life, will make us meeker and more devout. We shall not be induced to forsake prayer, we shall pray more. May we not hope that this our work for God will react on all our life ? The man of business, remembering how prayer to God relieved him amid these perplexities, will seek the same relief amid the perplexities of daily duty. He will look to Him who taught Hiram to work in brass, and Solomon to organize and pay his bands of labourers, to guide him in commercial complications, amid the necessities of trade. Reminded how much we owe to God, we shall be every day more grateful. Finding how good it is to offer of our substance to Him, we shall awake to our opportunities of using our means in His service, as to blessings that we have scarce

begun to enjoy. And the grateful, trusting heart will be deepened in gratitude and dependence. The stakes strengthened to bear the strain of these longer cords will support a yet greater length and more heavy curtains of canvas. We shall do more, for we shall find we can do more, and that it is a blessed thing for us to do more. The knowledge that we are working for God will purify us from selfishness; the knowledge that it is He who enables us to work for Him will keep us humble and make us grateful; while our work, bringing us into constant fellowship with Him and trust in Him will be felt to be increasingly a means of grace to ourselves. Our spiritual life will be nurtured, not impoverished, by what we shall do for God.

III. We must ever remember the great object for which we are building a new and larger house of prayer; the preaching of "*the unsearchable riches of Christ,*" "*the glorious gospel of the blessed God.*" It is to make Christ known; to proclaim the greatness of His salvation, the tenderness of His love, the mighty cost at which He redeemed us, His fidelity to us in His sacrifice of Himself, the zeal for God and desire to reconcile us to God that enabled Him to endure the cross and despise the shame, the perfection of His atonement and the assurance that they who trust in Him shall be saved. We build in testimony of God, His rule in the world, His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. We build in faith and token of the perpetual presence among us of the Holy Spirit, who dwells with us as our helper and our guide; prompting the church; stimulating, convicting, and converting the world; saving, renewing, and sanctifying men.

Everything that brings us into contact with the gospel is a blessing to us. This is the blessedness of reading the Bible, and meditation upon the truth. We sometimes get worn out and wearied, doubtful and perplexed, so worn out that we cannot even pray. Why is it that, at such a time, we betake ourselves to reading, meditation and the study of the Scriptures? It is that by gazing upon the truth, which abides strong and living though we are chilled and faint, by being brought again into contact with the gospel and the grace of God, our souls may be raised from their lethargy or restlessness; that God's facts may recover us from the gloom of our doubts and fancies. This, too, is the blessedness of our work among men; our intercourse with troubled, anxious, and tempted souls. Their need appealing to our pity, we are reminded of the cross of Christ, their only hope and solace; and we are made more hopeful, we ourselves are comforted, while we speak to them of the fidelity of our Father which is in heaven. And it will be even thus with us in this our work. The question again and again asked us of others, or suggesting itself to our own hearts, "What mean ye by this service?" will send us to Christ as its answer; we shall be brought into renewed contact with the very truths on which our own spiritual life depends.

Once more, our work is to preach the gospel, not merely concerning men, but to them. We know the needs of our neighbours, and are sure that Christ alone can help and save them; therefore we wish that great numbers may be gathered to hear of Him. Alas for us if we ever forget this! Nothing can make up for this. Our own religious emotions may, for a time, be stimu-

lated by the influence of a new, a larger, and more beautiful house of prayer. But if this be the only, or even the chief, result of our efforts, our new building will be a curse to us. —*As some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.*” To such a solemn warning every serious earnest Christian man will say, Amen. No goodliness of building, no improvement in the form or tone of worship, can compensate for the loss of love to the souls of dying men. Our rich, luxurious spiritual emotion, if it be gained at the cost of care for the sinful and perishing, will only be that last, most subtle form of spiritual pride, which will draw down on us spiritual destruction.

My brethren, never let us forget that our great duty is not to build a larger house for God; it is to fill that house and to preach the gospel to all who shall enter it. It is to proclaim God’s judgment to the impenitent, and His grace to the contrite; to preach pardon freely offered and life freely given to all the weary and sin-stricken; to speak to those “*who labour and are heavy laden*” of Him who promises them “*rest*;” to tell each one who is aware of the stress, and weary of the conflict, of life, of the blessed Father in whose love they may find courage, whose grace will cheer and support them. It is to single them out here and there, as they come in, each one with his own heartlessness, or folly, or grief, and beseech each one to be reconciled to God: to comfort the sorrowful, and sustain the drooping, and confirm the wavering, and encourage the timorous, with the one

message, "*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.*" "*He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*"

Bearing this ever in mind, we shall long for the completion of our work, not from any vanity or selfishness, but for the sake of preaching Christ to those who sorely need Him. We shall not lose faith in the gospel, or love for our fellow-sinners, in mere business cares; nor come to long for the old plain meeting-houses, where spiritual life was deep, and zeal for Christ and souls was fervid; for all that we do will increase our fervour and our faith. Neither shall we, in the progress of this work, neglect the one great work for which, as a Christian church, we have been gathered here. For ever as we anticipate larger congregations, and greater numbers listening to the words of life and hope, we shall be mindful that, even in this little congregation, there are souls who need their Saviour. The tide of life, with its conflicts, and struggles, and despairs, will be bearing us on, while we are building for the future. Dying souls are among us, some of whom may have passed from earth before this congregation will have entered its new house; over these we shall yearn, these we shall beseech to be reconciled to God. There are such here this morning, and to them I say, there will be no rest, there can be neither life nor hope for you, except in Christ. O, my brethren, now, even now, receive the gospel, Christ's message to you. Your Father is waiting for you; your Saviour is ready to receive you now. "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation.*"

Some of you may be giving money, time, thought, to

this work, and yet not have given yourselves to your Saviour. Think of the object of our efforts, and ask yourselves what mean your gifts and labours, if you are unsaved? I do not say, God despises and will reject your offering. I do not believe it. It is a privilege for even the unconverted to join in such a work this. But, O, how much greater the blessing to be yourself accepted by Him; to yield your heart, your life to Christ, the tender and all-sufficient Saviour!

And those of you whose joy is in Christ; who, because you know how precious He is to you, gladly consecrate much to Him, and wish that all should know Him; continue as you have begun, in faith and hope, in love and devotedness and service. He will not suffer those who work for Him to lose their spiritual life and vigour thereby. You are opening new channels down which His grace may flow and fertilize your life. *“Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”*



XXI.

THE UNCHANGING CHRIST.*

HEB. xiii. 8.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

OUR text must not be read together with verse 7, as though the two verses formed one sentence. It is not Christ who is "*the end of the conversation*" there spoken of, but death. "*Remember your rulers, who spake to you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation,*" i.e., the termination of their life. The writer of this epistle has been speaking of change. The old covenant was no more; it had decayed and waxed old and now was vanishing away. The "*many priests*" had not been "*suffered to continue by reason of death.*" The 11th chapter is the record of the multitudes who had gone without seeing that for which they waited. "*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off;*" they died, as they had lived, "*confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*" "*These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having pro-*

* Preached on the last day of 1865.

vided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." This perpetual change was continuing itself in the church. Here too, notwithstanding the promise of the speedy second coming of the Lord, many had died without seeing their hopes fulfilled. The Jewish christians had seen their leaders taken away. The sword and the flames had been the lot of some; again and again had their assemblies been broken up and their leaders scattered; in the "*great fight of afflictions,*" the faithful "*rulers, who had spoken to them the word of God,*" had closed their lives. It is as with a sigh of weariness that the writer closes his admonition to remember these, to call to mind their fidelity in death. Then the ejaculation is uttered by him, broken and fragmentary, but the breathing of a name: "*Jesus Christ yesterday and to-day the same, and for ever.*" All is not changeful; He abides. The teachers go; Jesus Christ remains. You have other leaders, we have other fellow-labourers; but not another Lord. So he rests, so they may rest; Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

The unchanging Christ; Jesus abiding the same amid all changes—this is the subject of our meditation this morning.

I. Follow for a moment the suggestions of the context; remember those who exercised a blessed, loving, wise "*rule*" over you, who "*spake to you the word of God,*" pastors, parents, friends; those who first interpreted to you your soul's yearning and restlessness, and pointed you to Christ for rest; the true and trusty ones who warned you against your dangers, and helped you in your temptations, and solaced you in your griefs;

who seemed to read your life, and could speak the very words you needed; whose prayers helped you, and whose instruction you were glad to seek; it is with weariness and sadness you remember what was the close of all. Death, or separation, or mutual alienation and distrust put an end to their guidance. Alas that association so blessed should have had an end. How weary the memory of the intercourse for ever closed! Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. It was He to whom they guided you, and of whom they spake; His name was the charm and solace of your associations. As you recall yesterday's friendship, it is hallowed by your memories of Him, the centre of your fellowship, the secret of their influence; to-day He is your Lord. Whatever changes, He is the same. The friendship is broken off; the Saviour, who was the life of your companionship, the inspiration of your love, has not changed. We can bear the memory of all that has ended, in our confidence that He abides the same.

A change in our own lives makes all things seem unstable. A child cannot understand the awe which sometimes settles down upon men who watch the closing years; cannot understand regretful memories of the past, trembling anticipations of the future. For many long years, it may be, we dwelt in pleased security, with all our blessings round us, peace in our dwellings that had never been disturbed, confidence in our souls that had never known a shock. Because we had no changes, we were afraid of nothing; with eager anticipation we hastened onwards, assured that "*to-morrow would be as this day and much more abundant.*" But the first change

we knew, the first association that came to an end, the first check that opposed us, the first hope blighted, the first confidence that was confounded, how differently did this make us look on all ! The earth itself seemed to reel under our staggering feet, and there was continuance in nothing. Our days were "*as a shadow,*" and there was "*no abiding.*" Change, ceaseless, wearisome change, seemed to be written on everything. "*The sun ariseth, and it goeth down : all the rivers run into the sea, yet is the sea not full.*" Nothing seemed sure, nothing steadfast ; the glory of the ages had departed ; instead of a process ever working on, a purpose ever fulfilling itself, we saw only the restlessness and vanity of perpetual change. It is at such a time a man can feel the strength and comfort of our text. They who are weary with changes that this year has brought will rest to-day most earnestly in the assurance, that whatever else has gone, Christ is still the same.

There comes on men sometimes a terrible fear of change. In the first flush of youth indeed, full of self-confidence and impetuosity, we go out boldly to meet all that time will bring us. The flippant and thoughtless, who skim over the surface of things, who have felt but little of life's realities, and learnt nothing by experience, are ever on the search for novelty ; they care only "*to tell, or to hear some new thing.*" Whatever happens, serious as it may be to multitudes, thoughtful as it might make them, is only regarded by them as giving them some new sensation, giving them fresh matter for idle chat. But those who know what changes in life really are, who have had all unexpectedly taken from them *their dearest treasure*, who have felt the trouble they

least anticipated and for which they were least prepared; whose heart has bled as one has gone, whose value to them they knew not till they lost him; those who have lost the strength that they thought so surely theirs; those whom unforeseen temptation has humbled in bitter self-loathing; those who pass old friends in the street, once prized, and now lost to them beyond recall—such men sometimes feel utterly insecure against future possibilities, and tremble at what may be in store for them. Such men are startled at an unknown hand-writing on a letter, fearing what news it may bring them. They will pause at their own door-step, not knowing but unforeseen calamity may, in their absence, have overtaken their homes. You may call all this morbid if you will; but I say there are many men so timorously apprehensive to-day. You may call it weak and cowardly if you will; but I say that the man who knows nothing but this world and its changes, is made a coward as the years go by. He walks as one not knowing how and whence and where the next blow may fall upon him; for the shocks he has sustained have come upon him without warning. He lives as one uncertain of the continuance of what is dearest to him; for his dearest treasures have ere now been taken away. The years in their progress take more than they bring; early associations, first hopes, the friends and counsellors of youth,—as these are removed their loss cannot be made good. Earthly change is earthly loss; “*the world passeth away,*” and “*desire*” itself “*fails.*” There is no cure for such a terror of changes, there is no security, no hope for man, save in Him who is unchanging. We must turn for rest to one who abideth

ever, and it is He whose name is itself our text, "*Jesus Christ yesterday and to-day the same, and for ever.*"

II. The longing for rest, the desire for what is stable and unchanging—this is our deepest want ; it grows and strengthens in us as we grow older, wiser, better men. When our impatience has been tamed, and our impetuosity has become subdued ; when we have learned to distrust ourselves, and wish for an immutable goodness on which to stay ; when we have learned to distrust the world, to look away from things and circumstances ; after we have felt weariness and disappointment, we grow to value quiet. Youth may wander, will wander and explore ; but manhood asks a home wherein to dwell. One of the sweetest conceptions of heaven is given us in the words, "*they shall go no more out for ever.*" But a coming rest is not all we ask ; is life all to be weary and changing ? must we ever be restless, carried about, tossed to and fro, and buffeted till the far-off day of death ? The thirty or twenty years of life here which our bodily frames seem to have yet before them ; shall we know no steadfastness, nothing immutable in them ? Till we enter on the final rest, is there no continuance ? Our text speaks of one who is even now unchanging. All is not fleeting ; Christ is the name. "*Yesterday and to-day*"—here, in the compass of our passing lives, we find a rest. He who is the certainty of eternity ; He who abides through all the ages, and from whose presence we shall not go out ; He is with us now. Before we go to Him, He has come to us, and with us He remains, the longed-for changeless One.

The words "*Jesus Christ yesterday and to-day the*

same," are intended to give us just this assurance. Such as these Jewish christians found Him when they first heard "*the word of God*;" Saviour, Guide and Friend; such as He then was, Helper, Teacher, Lord; tender to succour, wise to control; such as He was to them in their "*great fight of afflictions*," courage in their temptations, comforter in their distresses, their refuge against the malice of the persecutor, their friend when the pastor was smitten and the flock was scattered; such is He also to-day. The times had changed indeed since they first were told that the hope of Israel was accomplished, and the Christ was come; since then the fires had blazed for the christians and the axe had reddened with their blood; the peace in which they were allowed to hear the gospel while the Cæsar was careless about the new sect, had been rudely disturbed, and they were living now in constant apprehension: but Jesus had not changed. His eye was on them and His ear was open to their cry; still was He touched with the feeling of their infirmities, still did He comfort and help and govern. No time could alter His watchfulness, no change affect His tender, boundless love; Jesus Christ was "*yesterday and to-day the same.*"

The secret of our confidence in a changing world is the unchangeable Christ. Let time bring with it what it may, we are assured of His fidelity. Let other hopes die out in disappointment, the hope of my spirit endures. Let me learn what painful lessons I may about my feeble purposes and uncertain heart; broken with penitence, sad and ashamed at so many resolutions unfulfilled, weary with wicked and fruitless wandering from His good care, I shall find Him ready as ever to pardon,

gracious as ever to restore. In temptation we learn strange and humbling lessons about ourselves; the lusts we thought subdued "*conceive and bring forth sin*;" we fall; but He is the same, calm as ever to soothe, strong as ever to subdue. Our wisdom sometimes proves our folly; we go after "*divers and strange doctrines*," and our proud speculations end in "*profane and vain babblings*;" but Christ is wise as ever to teach us, ready again to guide our erring thoughts. "*Yesterday*" we found Him precious; when for the first time we stood by the grave-side, He comforted us, "*the resurrection and the life*." He is the same "*to-day*," solacing our newest grief. "*Yesterday*" we heard His voice; His name was on the lips of those who spoke to us the Word of God. The teachers have gone, or we have outgrown them. The time has come for us when no man can answer our questions, but alone we must await the revelation of the truth. We must "fight" our own "doubts" and "gather strength;" we must hear for ourselves the call of duty and choose our own way in life. But He is still the same; if the teachers are gone, the Truth is with us. The living Word of God, who speaks from the lips of counsellors, is Himself our counsellor. What changes need we now fear? We may be troubled, but we cannot be daunted; surprised, but not unmanned. The deep reality of life abides the same; Jesus Christ the same to-day as yesterday.

III. The words "*for ever*" fall strangely on our ears; the solemn future is unknown and unimaginable. We often fall back baffled in our endeavours to grasp the mystery of the world to come. We read over the refer-

ences to it in the Bible—designedly, necessarily few and scanty as they are ; fewer and scantier than many persons deem—and we fail to apprehend it. The world wherein the mighty hosts of the departed are gathered, how vast it is, how calculated to give the sense of utter loneliness in that great throng ! The world whereto my loved ones have gone before me, where I shall await those who lay me in the grave ; where shall we meet, how know each other there ? The work of heaven ; what shall we have to do, what blessed service will the sons of God render their Father through the everlasting years ? The great change that will pass upon myself ; how will my life here and my life hereafter be bound in one ? what shall I take with me, what shall I leave behind ? what of the passion which here so often is power, and yet so often is weakness ? what of memory ? what of the habits by which I apprehend and continue myself ? Fixing our thoughts on these things, we are overwhelmed by the conception of awful, mysterious, inconceivable change ; small wonder if at times we cling to this life, poor as it is, yet all we know. Here I can work, here I can feel, here I am somewhat at home ; but that world will be so unutterably strange. Again the thought of the immutable One bears up out of the confusion of changing things. There will be more familiarity than strangeness there, for “ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.* ” He will not be unknown ; He will be recognized who quickened and guided and sustained us, who was the stedfastness and identity of our passing earthly life. It is thus we may conceive the writer of this Epistle, following out the anticipation that led him onwards into the vast unknown,

laying hold of One who would never vary ; adding to the consoling words, "*Jesus Christ yesterday and to day the same,*" the assurance, tender as a whisper, triumphant as a song, "*and for ever.*"

To those christians who would read the words translated "*for ever*" in their original form, "*unto the ages,*" they would have a further suggestion. They were accustomed to look on God's purpose in the universe as unfolding itself in a series of æons or dispensations. It had been so in the history of this world ; they themselves were living in the end of one dispensation, the old world passing away ; a new world, another age, was immediately commencing. Words had come to them from the heavens of old, obscurely referring to at least one other dispensation that had accomplished itself before man was created. Paul speaks of worlds and epochs, of which we now know nothing, that are all to be gathered together and seen fulfilled in Christ. An amazing prospect thus seemed unfolding itself before them. As our earth forms part of a solar system, and this system again of a stellar world, and many stellar worlds, impassable to one another, yet all connected by the central force, revolve around the throne of the Invisible ; so might the history of man, with its varying epochs, be included in another dispensation, itself but one of many æons, all evolving one thought, one eternal purpose of God. In the world to come there may be further dispensations, each fulfilling a thought, and all illustrating the mighty being, of God. Here are changes, grand, stupendous, unimaginable. But in the midst of all is seen one unchanging Christ. Let dispensation succeed dispensation, and age follow age, and the æons

of the æons still open up, and broaden out, and deepen on, and lengthen themselves immeasurable, inconceivable; Jesus Christ is "*the same unto the ages.*" New they will be, but they will not be strange; the changes will but illustrate the unchangeable. He who trod this earth a child; who toiled and suffered here a man; the Saviour who wept and struggled and prayed; the Christ who died on Calvary; the Lord who won you to Himself, and reconciled you to God, who comforted you, and taught you, and preserved you faithful; the Jesus of humanity; the Christ consecrated and sent into the world to sanctify us to God; He who is the same in the "*yesterday and to day*" of this weak, erring, but, since He fills it, this blessed life; He is "*the same unto the ages.*"

IV. You will observe that it is not of a thing that is the same, nor even of a truth conceived to be the same, that our text speaks, but of a person who is the same. It is in our personal relations that we feel the identity or the changes of life. Our life continues the same amidst many vicissitudes, so long as the persons we have to do with are unchanged. One returns to England a man, who left it a youth; then fresh, light in step and gay of heart, now bowed and furrowed and grave; he comes to the home of his childhood, and finds grass growing where the Christmas fires had been wont to burn, finds streets standing in the meadows where he played. But let him enter the dwelling of his family, let brother clasp again his brotherly hand, and his father utter the welcome back, let a sister's kiss be felt upon his cheek, and a mother's blessing ring in his ears, all the old time is given him again; nothing, he feels, is altered while the

home remains. The brave man can face all vicissitudes, while he looks still on the old faces, and hears the old tones; and even the timorous finds a dreaded alteration of circumstances no real change while all his dear ones are around him still. Disaster is little, loss is little; the shock passes over, and there is no utter loss if only affection continues. But the absence of one companion may make the old home unbearable for strangeness. What is it to you that you keep your gold, when a child is carried out to return no more? This is not the success for which I strove, this triumph that the trusted friend cannot share. Persons are more to us than things; it was the absence of the men and women and children from whom we have parted company, which first made us learn to tremble at the future, and cry out upon the restlessness and vanity of life.

It is a person, abiding ever, unchanging ever, of whom our text speaks; He who is most of all to us, the life of our soul, whose love awoke us to life's true value, whose care gave us first to know how deep and real friendship may be. Amidst the flux of things, the flow of events, the heart rests on one unchanging friend. We may stand solitary, where once we stood circled with affection, alone but not alone, for He is with us. Truest companion, trustiest guide; He who "*laid down his life for his friends;*" Jesus Christ is "*the same yesterday and to day, and for ever.*"

V. My brethren, let me speak to you personally of the unchanging Saviour. Well is it for you who trust in Christ. Sorrow cannot long dim your eyes, for He is the unchanging Comforter. Disappointment cannot quench your hopefulness, for He is the unchanging Hope.

Difficulties will not daunt you, for He is the unchanging Helper. You will not sink in weakness, for He is the unchanging Strength. You need not fear temptation, for His is an unchanging succour. Sin will not overmaster you, nor guilt drive you to despair; for He whose blood first cleansed you will cleanse you still, and the ear into which you breathed your first penitence is listening still for your repentant prayer. Death has no terror for you, and the endless ages will not see you shaken; for He is "*the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*"

The most distressing changes are those in which we ourselves are changed. There may be some here to-day sadly contrasting the close of this year with its commencement. Then they were full of hope, now they are almost in despair. A year's backsliding, the carelessness and unbelief of many days have wrought a sad difference upon them. A year ago Christ seemed very near them; their hearts were open to His presence, they lived in communion with Him. What were their plans of Christian activity; how they would advance in Christian faith and knowledge; what progress they were to make in Christian excellence! Now, looking back, they see only a wasted, dreary year. They were disobedient, misbelieving; they fell before temptation; they sinned as they thought they never could have sinned; and the gospel now seems cold and dead to them, every spiritual affection appears withered up. My brethren, you are changed, but He is not. Come again penitent, you will find Him still forgiving. Come again contrite and lowly, again He will lift you up. He is pitiful, earnest as ever, ready as ever to pardon, quicken, and restore.

And you to whom all your life long He has "*stretched out his hands,*" to whom He has been ever "*calling,*" whose childhood He surrounded with pious guardians, whose conscience He has often aroused, whose hearts have sometimes been glad to hear His voice; you who have still rejected Him, you to whom a Christian life has long seemed only a dream in memory, a possibility left far behind; to you too He is still the same. Your conscience may be sluggish, His voice is powerful to arrest; your heart may have grown hard, His love is strong to melt; your will may have become obdurate, His grace is mighty to subdue. Come to Him, sinners; and all you ever hoped, all you were ever taught, all that the gospel promises, He will be to you. Despair is not for any, for "*Jesus Christ is yesterday and to day the same, and for ever.*"

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the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are aged 65 and over has increased from 10.5 million to 13.5 million (13.5% of the population).

There is a growing awareness of the need to address the needs of older people, and the Government has set out a strategy for the 21st century in the White Paper on *Ageing Better: The Government's Strategy for Older People* (Department of Health 1999). This strategy is based on the following principles:

• Older people should be able to live independently and actively in their own homes.

• Older people should be able to live in their own communities, and be able to take part in the life of their communities.

• Older people should be able to live in good health, and be able to take part in the life of their communities.

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